

On the Margins

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On the Margins

**Essays on the History of Jews
in Estonia**

Anton Weiss-Wendt



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*To Eugenia Gurin-Loov (1922–2001) and
Boris Lipkin (b. 1932)*

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Preface

by Antony Polonsky

Ralph Waldo Emerson has written that “all history is autobiography.” The observation is borne out by this moving and innovative volume, which is both an account of the history of the Jews of Estonia and of how the author came to take up this subject. Its title, *On the Margins*, could apply to both the author and his topic. Anton Weiss-Wendt was born in the town of Narva in the extreme east of Estonia, in which during the interwar period about one-third of the population was Russian-speaking (today, as a result of Soviet rule, the percentage has risen to over 90 percent). His paternal grandfather, Helmut Weiss, was a young Jewish communist from Dresden, whose tragic life is painstakingly reconstructed in chapter 4 of this book. Helmut’s father, an accountant, was born in Chervonohrad (until 1953 called Krystynopol in Polish and Kristinopol in Ukrainian), a small town situated about 65 kilometers northeast of Lviv (Lwów) in today’s Ukraine. His mother came from Leipzig. Helmut’s father died a natural death in 1939 while his mother vanished without trace and was probably murdered by Nazis in occupied Poland. Helmut, their only son, immigrated to the Soviet Union in December 1934, where he hoped to work as a journalist. In spite of his commitment to the communist cause, he soon, like most foreign communists, aroused the suspicion of the NKVD. During the period of Great Terror he was arrested and sentenced to 10 years of corrective labor on cooked-up charges of espionage and terrorism. His wife, another communist émigré, Erna Brandt, attempted unsuccessfully to intervene on his behalf and may have been arrested herself. Weiss never heard from her again.

The following ten years Weiss spent in Dolinka, Kazakhstan, where he met his second wife, Elisabeth Luigas, who came from a mixed Estonian-Russian family. She wound up in the Gulag after being arrested in July 1941 because of her membership in the Russian Christian Youth Association (a youth movement sponsored by Russian émigrés in France). In No-

vember 1948 their son, Yuri, was born and spent his early childhood in the Gulag. After Helmut's release in 1957 the couple settled in Narva. His wife died in September 1999 and he followed her a year later. Helmut had renounced his Communist Party membership in early 1991 although he continued to believe in the communist ideal.

Anton's mother's family was Estonian. Between 1918 and 1944 they had run a farm located in the area where in the latter part of the war the Nazis had established forced labor camps for Jews from Lithuania. Both her uncles served in the Estonian auxiliary police, *Omakaitse* (Self-Defense), during the Nazi occupation and one had been in charge of food supplies to the Jewish camp at Viivikonna. On several occasions he had abused his position by bringing a handful of Jews from the camp to help on the farm. After the war he was sentenced to five years of forced labor, primarily on account of hunting down and killing Soviet parachutists.

Given his complex background, encapsulating many aspects of the tragic history of Eastern Europe in the twentieth century, it is not surprising that Anton should have been drawn to investigate the past of his country and of its Jewish minority. In the early 1990s, shortly after Estonia regained its independence, he became involved in a project to map the ruined cemeteries around his native Narva; this is how he came across a Jewish cemetery. When asking his grandparents what they knew of the Jewish past of the town, he made a startling discovery that his own grandfather was Jewish. Reading, at random, such books as Susan Zuccotti's *The Italians and the Holocaust*, he was inspired to study history at the University of Tartu where he became fascinated with the history of the Jews. Through the Fulbright Commission in Estonia he became involved with the Office of Special Investigation of the United States Department of Justice, which has been investigating allegations of war crimes against individuals who had immigrated to the United States from Europe after the Second World War. After a period at New York University, he came to Brandeis, where he completed a doctorate under my direction on local collaboration in the Holocaust in Estonia. His dissertation was published in 2009 by Syracuse University Press as *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* and has since then established itself as the definitive work on the subject.

In this collection of essays, he expands on some of the issues elaborated in *Murder Without Hatred* in an attempt to place the fate of the Jews in Estonia during the Second World War in the larger context of Jewish history. Although these topics may seem to be "on the margins," they graphically illustrate some of the key processes in Jewish history in the

brutal and violent twentieth century. The first chapter examines the development of Jewish life in Estonia from the second half of the nineteenth century to 1917, through the prism of Jewish settlement in Narva. The Estonian Jewish community was one of the smallest and most recent in Europe. Like that in neighboring Finland, it emerged only in the nineteenth century and was made up of former soldiers and those groups who were allowed by the reforms of Alexander II to reside outside the Pale of Settlement. Small traders and artisans made up the bulk of the Jewish community in Estonia which on the eve of the First World War numbered 5,500.

Jewish life in Estonia was adversely affected by the Russian Civil War and a number of Jews left the country. More than half of the 4,434 Jews in Estonia (0.4 percent of the total population) lived in the capital, Tallinn. Antisemitism seems to have been a marginal phenomenon in interwar Estonia, despite the coup of March 1934 that brought to power the semi-authoritarian government of acting President Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner and the closer relations with Nazi Germany from the mid-1930s. Although Estonia signed a declaration guaranteeing minority rights only in September 1923—under strong pressure from the League of Nations—the extensive cultural autonomy granted to the Jewish community in February 1925 lasted until the Soviet occupation in the summer of 1940. This autonomous system is discussed in chapter 2, where Weiss-Wendt convincingly demonstrates that Jews were the residual legatees of the desire of the Estonian government to appease the Baltic German population. Nevertheless, the international Jewish community appreciated what it saw as the benevolence of the Estonian government. In 1927 the Jewish National Fund in Palestine presented the Estonian government with a certificate of appreciation intended to show gratitude “for the first historical deed in the history of Israel through the gift of national and cultural autonomy to the Jewish minority in Estonia.” The Jews were a marginal factor in Estonian economic life, mainly contributing as small businessmen and artisans. German and Russian cultural influence remained dominant in the community, even though Estonian acculturation was beginning to take place, particularly after 1934. Essentially, this was a small and relatively adynamic community whose relations with the majority population Weiss-Wendt describes as “friendly, yet largely superficial.”

Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 discuss different aspects of the tragic fate of the Jews in Estonia during the Second World War. Chapter 3 analyzes the vexed topic of the Jews under Soviet occupation in 1940–41. In all those areas that were assigned to the Soviet Union by the Molotov-Ribbentrop

Pact of August 1939 and which were subsequently occupied by Nazi Germany, the occupation authorities used the trope of “Judeobolshevism” to argue that the Soviet regime was essentially controlled by a world Jewish conspiracy. This type of propaganda fell on fertile soil and was responsible for the wave of anti-Jewish violence from Latvia in the north to Bessarabia in the south. Although spontaneous anti-Jewish pogroms did not occur in Estonia, the argument that the Jews had extensively collaborated with the Soviets was used to justify the judicial murder of those Jews still in the country. Making use of NKVD investigation files, Weiss-Wendt shows that Jews were not a prominent element in the Soviet apparatus established from June 1940 onward and suffered disproportionately under Soviet rule. Thus he concludes that “[g]enerally, the proportion of Estonian Jews in the Soviet apparatus fluctuated between 1 and 4 percent, regardless of which statistics one takes as a basis.” Among the 10,157 victims of the Soviet deportation of June 14, 1940, there were 439 Jews, who constituted 10 percent of the total Jewish population of Estonia.

There are some paradoxical features to the implementation of the Nazi “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in Estonia. Nearly 3,000 Jews (two-thirds of the Jewish population), were able to flee the country before the Nazi occupation in July-August 1941 along with 62,000 other citizens of Estonia. Thus, fewer than 1,000 Jews remained in Estonia. Some had waited too long to flee and were thus trapped by the rapid German advance. Others, partly because they remembered the German occupation at the end of the First World War positively, and partly because the Soviets had downplayed Nazi persecution of the Jews, felt that their lives would be tolerable under Nazi rule. Still others were married to non-Jews or were well integrated into Estonian society. Knowledge of the difficult conditions in the Soviet Union also fed the desire to remain. The remaining Jews were subsequently identified, arrested, and executed by the Estonians on German orders, enabling the Nazi occupation authorities to proclaim Estonia the first country in Europe “free of Jews.” Given the small number of Jews in occupied Estonia, the German Security Police encouraged the Estonian authorities, who were eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the Third Reich in the hope of obtaining a political status similar to that of Slovakia, to undertake judicial procedures against them. In what were essentially kangaroo courts, nearly a thousand former citizens of Estonia were put on trial individually for collaboration with the Soviet regime and disloyalty to Estonia by special “Punishment Planning Commissions” set up by the Estonian Security Police. Roughly half of the interrogation and trial records have been preserved; examined in detail in chapter 5, they

provide a fascinating insight into the murder of the 963 Estonian Jews. These quasi-legal procedures were for the most part accepted by the local population, a fair number of whom gave testimony in these investigations. In a relatively small number of cases, the prosecutions were the result of denunciations. An unexpectedly large number gave testimonies favorable to Jews or submitted petitions in an attempt to defend their Jewish acquaintances, and sometimes spouses. This is how the process of destruction evolved in the capital city. The way this process was carried out in provincial centers such as Pechory, Paide, Kuressaare, Pärnu, Narva, and Tartu is reconstructed in detail in chapter 6.

Chapter 7 examines another paradoxical feature of the Holocaust in Estonia, the establishment by the Germans in late 1943 of a network of nearly twenty forced labor camps for Jews. By then, Heinrich Himmler seems to have relaxed his obsessive campaign to rid continental Europe of Jews due to the acute shortage of manpower faced by the Third Reich. Deported to Estonia from the liquidated Kovno and Vilna ghettos, some of the Jews held in Estonian labor camps were used to build defense lines, but most worked in the Estonian shale oil industry, which became increasingly important for the Nazi war effort in the last stages of the war. Conditions in these camps were so brutal that nearly 55 percent of the more than 9,000 Jews sent to Estonia perished.

How those responsible for these crimes were punished in the Soviet period is analyzed in chapter 8. Two major war crimes trials took place in Estonia in March 1961 and January 1962, the result of both the Soviet desire to emulate the Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann and the enactment of the Principles of Criminal Legislation, which made it possible for individuals accused of high treason to be tried by regular courts. Weiss-Wendt argues that the Soviet investigation of war crimes was part of Cold War politics, but also reflected a genuine desire to punish collaborators derived from the major role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazism. The Cold War aspect of these trials was clearly evident in the fact that of the seven defendants who stood trial in Tallinn and Tartu in 1961 and 1962 only three were physically present in Estonia. Soviet propaganda made a case that leading figures who had collaborated with the Nazis in Estonia had been given shelter in the West. An important issue examined in this chapter is the cooperation between the American and Soviet legal authorities. Weiss-Wendt shows how effective cooperation was established in January 1980 between Allan Ryan and Walter Rockler of the U.S. Justice Department and the Soviet Prosecutor General Roman Rudenko, in spite of the deteriorating relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

A final chapter examines contemporary attitudes to the role of Estonian society in the persecution and murder of the country's Jews. Weiss-Wendt attempts to explain why there has not yet been a profound discussion, in spite of the establishment in 1998 of an International Estonian Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity. In the absence of public opinion polls on the topic, he investigates the responses of newspaper readers to Holocaust-related articles on the Internet. These responses reveal "high levels of antisemitism among those who choose to express their views on the Holocaust in general and Estonia's share in the Nazi genocide of the Jews in particular." As he convincingly demonstrates, while in Western Europe and North America the Holocaust is seen as carrying a universalistic message, in Estonia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe it is ultimately linked to attitudes toward Jews and antisemitism. Most Estonians thus respond to calls to confront the Holocaust as something imposed on them by Americans and West Europeans with no direct connection to their country. It is to be hoped that this calm, dispassionate, and yet perturbing book will help rectify this situation.

Studying Estonian Jewish History: A Professional and Personal Journey

The history of Jews in Estonia, as usually told, is a feel-good story. Jews have traditionally been well integrated into Estonian society. Unlike other East European countries, interwar Estonia had low levels of antisemitism, which even the far right felt shy to exploit. Consequently, in 1926 the government granted the Jewish minority extensive cultural autonomy. Lasting until the Soviet takeover in 1940, Jewish cultural autonomy was unprecedented in the European context. Two-thirds of the Jews managed to get out of Estonia prior to Nazi occupation and thus survived, and most of them returned after the end of the Second World War. Compared with other parts of the Soviet Union, antisemitism rarely came to the surface in Estonia in the postwar decades. Ethnic tolerance and the more liberal intellectual environment brought to Estonia scores of Jews from Russia, among them Yuri Lotman. A Tartu University professor, Lotman effectively created a school of semiotics, which posthumously earned him the title of the man of the twentieth century in Tartu. Due to internal migration, the size of the Jewish population in Soviet Estonia exceeded that in independent Estonia—perhaps the only such example in post-Holocaust Europe. The Jewish community was among the first ethnic minorities in Estonia to officially reconstitute in the waning days of the USSR. The process of integration was equally successful after Estonia regained its independence in 1991. The newest synagogue in the Baltic states is in Tallinn, erected in 2007. Among other facilities, the synagogue features an excellent, if small, museum of Jewish history in Estonia.

This is of course all true. Yet the bright picture painted above represents just one side of the story; the other side, predictably, is much less glorious. Jews had historically constituted a marginal group in Estonia within its current borders. This was mainly due to the fact that present-day Estonia—administratively split between three different provinces—lay outside of the

so-called Pale of Jewish Settlement and was thus effectively off limits to Jews during the tsarist era. Jewish cultural autonomy was more of an afterthought than a consistent policy of the Estonian government. Proportionate to their share in the general population, more Jews than Estonians fell victim to the Soviet deportation of June 1941. About one thousand Jews who decided to stay in Estonia were identified, arrested, and executed by the Estonians on German orders. Those Estonians who had partaken in mass murder were motivated by rational choice rather than by racial anti-semitism. There were essentially no survivors among the Estonian Jews, which made the Nazis proclaim Estonia the first country in Europe “free of Jews”—a dubious honor it shared with Serbia. The death rate among Estonian Jews was therefore the highest anywhere. Although undoubtedly enjoying more freedoms than in the rest of the Soviet Union, Jews in postwar Estonia became a target of anti-Zionist ideology all the same. Due to emigration, numbers of Jews in independent Estonia fell below two thousand, the lowest it ever been since the mid-nineteenth century. The Estonian Jewish Museum is essentially a one-man project by an Israeli citizen who left Estonia for good nearly forty-five years ago.

What appear to be two parallel stories should ideally be merged into one; what we are missing is a comprehensive history of the Jews in Estonia. Hence the present book, which seeks to signpost crucial elements in the evolution of the Estonian Jewish community. Paraphrasing the question that Melvyn P. Leffler attempted to answer in his 1999 review essay on the origins of the Cold War, I ask what we now know about the Jews in Estonia, what we do not yet know, and what we ought to know.¹ Mine is not complete history, but a detailed analysis that may help someone to write one in the future.

Estonian Jews take pride in their contribution to culture and science, and for good reason. Rather typical for the postwar period, however, none of the most recognizable cultural and academic figures in Estonia—literary scholar Yuri Lotman (1922–1993), actor Eino Baskin (1929–2015), and conductor Eri Klas (b. 1939)—advertised their ethnic identity. Baskin and Klas “came out” as Jews only after the process of liberalization in the Soviet Union kicked in during the late 1980s. Klas embraced his Jewishness more emotionally than Baskin.² The former was among the guests attending

¹ Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know’?” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 501–24.

² Cf. Eino Baskin, *Raudeesriide taga* [Behind the Iron Curtain] (Pärnu: Perona, 1993); Eri Klas, *Kes ma olen?* [Who am I?] (Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 1999); Yuri

the opening of the Estonian Jewish Museum in December 2008. The danger here is to paint individuals like Baskin or Lotman as being more Jewish than they were willing to admit. After all is said and done, the way their careers evolved, Lotman swore by the name of Alexander Pushkin, and Baskin did not necessarily regard Solomon Mikhoels among his heroes. Eventually we have to admit that Estonia is a small country with numerically weak Jewish population. Even Lotman, who almost single-handedly created a school of semiotics, is little known outside academic circles. Perhaps the only internationally recognized figure who hailed from Estonia is architect Louis Kahn (1901–1974). Yet Kahn can hardly be described as an “Estonian Jew.” Kahn’s family moved from Estonia to the United States when he was just five, and it was in the United States where he made a name for himself as one of the quintessential modernist architects. One may approach the issue of fame and recognition altogether differently. Take Ella Amitan-Wilensky (1893–1995), who in her late seventies produced one of the first historical overviews of Estonian Jewish history in English.³ Amitan-Wilensky is Israel’s beloved children’s book author, among the first to start writing in Hebrew.

Within Jewish world history, Estonia typically features as a mere footnote. For example, the first major overview, Ezra Mendelsohn’s *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* from 1983, contains exactly one page, symptomatically called “A Note on Estonian Jews.” His other work of ten years later, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, does not have even that.⁴ Heiko Haumann’s *A History of East European Jews* squeezed the history of Jews in Estonia into two sentences, while Nora Levin’s two-volume *Paradox of Survival: The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* has just one paragraph on Estonia’s Jews, dealing exceptionally with the period of Soviet occupation of 1940–41.⁵ An ambitious study of nearly one

Lotman, *Vospitanie dushi: Vospominania, interviii, besedy o russkoi kulture (televizionnye lektssii)* [Nurturing the soul: Recollections, interviews, conversations on Russian culture] (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003).

³ Ella Amitan-Wilensky, “Estonian Jewry: A Historical Summary,” in *The Jews in Latvia*, ed. Mendel Bobe (Tel-Aviv: Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, 1971), 336–37.

⁴ Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 253–54; Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 40.

⁵ Heiko Haumann, *A History of East European Jews* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2002), 233; Nora Levin, *Paradox of Survival: The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 353–54.

thousand pages by David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939*, omits Estonia altogether. Even the best book there is, Antony Polonsky's *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, mentions Estonia only in the context of the Holocaust.⁶ If we take Polonsky's opus magnum—with a total of two thousand pages divided into three volumes—it is not that Estonia is unimportant, but that there is so much to say about the Jews elsewhere and so little is known about their life in the northernmost Baltic country. Indeed, Estonia is one of the few countries in Europe, and the only one in the Baltic, that lacks a comprehensive, up-to-date history of the Jews.⁷ Geographical proximity does not necessarily make the three Baltic states an ideal case for comparison anyway. When it comes to migration patterns, makeup of the Jewish community, Jewish-Gentile relations, and levels of antisemitism, Estonia is perhaps closer to Finland and Norway than it is to Latvia and Lithuania, at least until 1940.⁸

⁶ David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, 1914–2008*, vol. 3 (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 429–30, 494, 517, 545.

⁷ Cf. Mendel Bobe et al., eds. *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel-Aviv: Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, 1971); Dovs Levins, *Ebreju vēsture Latvijā: No apmešanās sākumiem līdz mūsu dienām* [Latvian Jewish history: From the beginning of the settlement until today] (Rīga: Vaga, 1999); Leo Dribins, Armands Gūtmanis, and Mārgers Vestermanis, *Latvia's Jewish Community: History, Tragedy, Revival* (Riga: Institute of the History of Latvia, 2001); Leo Dribins, *Ebreji Latvijā* [Jews of Latvia] (Rīga: Elpa, 2002); Josifs Šteimanis, *History of Latvian Jews* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2002); Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit. Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community, 1316–1945* (Jerusalem: Gefen Books, 1995); Nancy and Stuart Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996); Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001); *Žydų gyvenimas Lietuvoje / Jewish Life in Lithuania*, exhibition catalog (Vilnius: The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2001); Dovid Katz, *Lithuanian Jewish Culture* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2004).

⁸ Cf. Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år* [Jewish history in Norway over 300 years], 2 vols. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969, 1982); *Jewish Life and Culture in Norway: Wergelands Legacy*, exhibition catalog (New York: self-published, 2003); Jon Reitan, *Jødene fra Trondheim* [Jews from Trondheim], Trondheim: Tapir, 2005); Per K. Sebak, '...Vi blir neppe nogensinne mange her': *Jøder i Bergen 1851–1945* ['We are just a few here': Jews in Bergen, 1851–1945] (Bergen: Vigmostad & Bjørke, 2008); Taimi Torvinen, *Kadimah: Suomen juutalaisten historia* [Kadimah: A history of Finnish Jews] (Helsinki: Otava, 1989); Dan Kantor, Mindele London-Zweig, and Simo Muir, eds., *Le-chaim! Kuvia Suomen juutalaisten historiasta / Images From the History of Jews in*

The study of Jewish history in Estonia began as an amateur affair and has until now been largely driven by the enthusiasm of practitioners. In 1926, Kopl Jokton (1902–1957) produced the first compendious study, *Di geshikhhte fun di yidn in Estland*, while finishing his law degree at the University of Tartu. This was essentially an extended essay of fifty pages with a focus on Tartu. Jokton's manuscript on Jewish student body at Tartu had remained unfinished. Exceptionally, Jokton was active as an author and secretary of the Jewish Cultural Council despite having lost both his legs as a soldier in the First World War; he died in France. Since 1992 Jokton's pamphlet has been available in the Estonian translation.⁹ Much of what we know about the earliest Jewish history in Estonia, which goes back to 1373, is thanks to Nosson Genss (1885–1972). A Physician by profession, Genss had an antiquarian approach to history, collecting each and every piece of information he could find about Jews in Estonia, particularly in Tallinn. Genss worked through several collections at Tallinn City Archives, resulting in a thin book, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Eesti: Die Revaler Synagoge in Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte der Juden in Reval*. Continuing with his project, three years later, in 1937, Genss published an eighty-page-long bibliography of Judaica in Estonia.¹⁰ The materials used by Genss, including written notes, correspondence, and printed matters, are deposited with the Estonian National Archives in Tallinn. Abe Liebmann (1914–1990) was the only professionally trained historian who, also in 1937, defended his Master's Thesis at the University of Tartu on the preconditions for the establishment of a Jewish community in Estonia. While Genss managed to escape from Estonia in the summer of 1941 before the advancing German troops, Liebmann was mobilized in the Soviet Army. Despite his attempts to revise his thesis in order to make it sound more politically correct, he fell out with the new authorities during late Stalinism, though he eventually

Finland (Helsinki: Helsinki Jewish Community, 2006); Laura K. Ekholm, "Boundaries of an Urban Minority: The Helsinki Jewish Community From the End of Imperial Russia Until the 1970s" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2013).

⁹ Kopl Jokton, *Juutide ajalooost Eestis* [On Estonian Jewish history] (Tartu: 1926 [1992]).

¹⁰ Nosson Genss, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Eesti: Die Revaler Synagoge in Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte der Juden in Reval* (Tartu: R. Selmanowitsch, 1933); Genss, *Bibliograafia Judaica Eestis / Bibliografie fun yidishe druk-oisgaben* [Judaica bibliography in Estonia] (Tallinn: Libris, 1937). See also "Eesti juudid kunstnikkude ja kirjanikkudena (Estonian Jews as artists and writers), *Rahvaleht*, December 5, 1929, available online at: <http://eja.pri.ee/Culture/juudid%20kunstis%201929.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2015).

made a successful career as a historian of the Communist Party after the death of Stalin.¹¹ The fourth individual who made a significant contribution to Jewish studies in Estonia during the interwar period was Paul Ariste (1905–1990), who could be safely described as a Judeophile. Out of curiosity, Ariste learned Yiddish from a schoolmate, eventually becoming a famous linguist and folklorist who could converse in sixteen languages. He spoke and wrote Yiddish fluently, which made him the only Gentile scholar whom the Estonian Jewish community sent as its representative to a major international conference.¹²

Nothing of substance appeared in print on the subject of Estonian Jewish history until the late 1970s. During the following two decades, Dov Levin (b. 1925) positioned himself as a foremost expert on the Baltic states in Israel. Levin obtained his PhD in history from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he ended up teaching for many years. With 540 titles listed in his bibliography, Levin primarily used sources from the Yad Vashem Archives. By the nature of survivor testimonies, his major contribution has thus been to the study of the Holocaust and Jewish life under Soviet rule.¹³ It should be noted that Levin published significantly

¹¹ Abe Liebmann, “Ajaloollised ja kultuurilised eeldused juudi koguduste tekkimiseks ja kujunemiseks Eestis” [Historical and cultural preconditions for the emergence and evolution of Jewish communities in Estonia] (MA Thesis, University of Tartu, 1937); Liebmann, “Juut-kantonistide probleem tsaari-Venemaal ja Eestis” [The issue of Jewish Cantonist soldiers in Tsarist Russia and Estonia], *Ajalooline Ajakiri* 1 (1941): 87–97; Liebmann, “Kriitilised parandused oma 1937.a. kirjutatud töös ‘Ajaloollised ja kultuurilised eeldused juudi koguduste tekkimiseks ja arenemiseks Eestis’, leiduvate väärseisukohtade ja valehinnangute revideerimise kohta” [Critical amendments to my 1937 study] (Addendum to 1937 MA Thesis, University of Tartu, 1946). See also Toomas Hiio, “Jewish Student Fraternities at the University of Tartu: A Part of Baltic Student Tradition,” paper delivered at the conference “Exceptional Estonia: Jewish Academic Life and Cultural Autonomy in the Republic of Estonia Between the Two World Wars (1918–1940), Tel Aviv University, April 10, 2014, available online at: <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Hiio.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2015).

¹² Paul Ariste, “Juut eesti rahvasuus” [The Jew in Estonian folklore], *Eesti Kirjandus* 1, 3, 5 (1932): 1–17, 132–50, 219–28. See also Anna Verschik, “The Yiddish Language in Estonia: Past and Present,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 117–28; Verschik, “Paul Ariste jidiši keele uurijana” [Paul Ariste as a student of Yiddish], *Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat* 51 (2005): 250–57.

¹³ Dov Levin, “Estonian Jews in the U.S.S.R. (1941–1945),” *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976): 273–97; Levin, “Estonia,” in *Pinkas ha-kehilot. Ensiklopediya shel ha-yishuvim le-min hivasdam ve-ad le-aher shoat milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniya: Latvia and Estonia*, 319–69 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988); Levin, “The Fateful Decision: The Flight of the Jews into the Soviet Interior in the Summer of 1941,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 10

more on Lithuania and Latvia than he did on Estonia. Levin examined the circumstances of Estonian Jews who fled to Russia proper in the summer of 1941 and their subsequent experiences in evacuation/exile until the end of the war. As Levin effectively stopped in 1945 in his research, we are yet to learn how the surviving Jews made it back to Estonia. Jewish migration within the Soviet Union remains altogether something of a blank spot. According to official statistics, Estonia was probably the only Soviet republic where the number of Jews increased compared to the interwar period, in fact by as much as 20 percent in 1959. The numbers went down somewhat during the 1970s due to mass emigration to Israel. In fact, some Jews from other parts of the USSR who had previously been refused exit visas traveled to Estonia in the hope to eventually leave for Israel.¹⁴ It is instructive to see how Tallinn fits in the Moscow-Kiev-Riga triangle where the so-called *refusenik* movement came to maturity.

As sketchy as it is, Estonian Jewish history has been properly contextualized in two respects: academic life at the University of Tartu and the Holocaust. Toomas Hiio has mapped Jewish student organizations as part of a larger project, *Album Academicum Universitatis Tartuens 1918–1944*.¹⁵ Tatiana Shor of the Estonian Historical Archives further expanded on this largely biographical database, in her numerous articles on the Jewish faculty and student body at Tartu since the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ When it comes to Jewish academics at the University of Tartu,

(1990): 115–42; Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under the Soviet Rule, 1939–1941* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Levin, “Hatsalat yehudim biyedei ha-sovietim be-milhemet ha-olam ha-sheeniya—Mikre’ Estoniya” [The rescue of Jews by the Soviets in WWII: The case of Estonia], in *The Holocaust, History and Memory: Essays in Honor of Israel Gutman*, ed. Shmuel Almog et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001): 133–51.

¹⁴ Benor and Talla Gurfel, *Iskhod*, unpublished memoirs, 2008, available online at: <http://eja.pri.ee/stories/Gurfel%20ishod.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2015); Gennadi Gramberg, untitled paper delivered at the seminar on Estonian-Jewish relations held in Tallinn in the fall of 1994, available online at: <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Gramberg.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2015).

¹⁵ Toomas Hiio, “Jewish Students and Jewish Student Organizations at the University of Tartu,” in *Tartu University Museum: Annual Report 1998* (Tartu University Museum, 1999), 119–72.

¹⁶ Tatiana Shor, “Evrei-prepodavateli v Tartuskom universitete (1632–1990)” [Jewish teaching staff at the University of Tartu, 1632–1990], in *Evrei v meniaishchemsia mire: materialy 3ei mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, Riga, 25–27 oktiabria 1999 g.*, ed. Herman Branover and Ruvin Ferber (Riga: University of Latvia, 2000), 234–44; Shor, “Evrei v Tartuskom universitete (1918–1940)” [Jews at the University of Tartu, 1918–1940], in *Proceedings of the Eight Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference on*

the Judaic studies program in existence between 1934 and 1940 was by far the most consequential, duly examined by scholars and former students.¹⁷

Jewish Studies, Part I / *Materialy Vosmoi Ezhegodnoi Mezhdunarodnoi Mezhdistsiplinarnoi konferentsii po iudaïke*, Chast I, ed. Rashid Kaplanov and Victoria Mochalova (Moscow: Sefer, 2001), 96–106; Shor, “Istochniki po istorii obrazovaniia evreev Estonii (XIX v. –1940)” [Sources on the history of Jewish education in Estonia, 19th century–1940], in *Mezhd Vostokom i Zapadom: Evrei v russkoi i evropeiskoi culture*, ed. Sergei Dotsenko and Irina Belobrovseva (Tallinn: Tallinn Pedagogical University Press, 2000), 248–57; Shor, “The Sources in Estonia for the Jewish Education History (19th century–1940),” in *Tartu University Museum: Annual Report 1998*, 189–96; Shor, “Zhertva Kholokosta professor-slavist Leopold Silberstein (1890–1941)” [Professor of Slavic studies Leopold Silberstein as a victim of the Holocaust, 1890–1941], in *Questions of Jewish History*, Part II / *Problemy evreiskoi istorii*, Chast II, ed. Victoria Mochalova, Konstantin Burmistrov, Elena Nosenko-Shtein, Arye Olman, Vladimir Petrukhin, Evgenii Rashkovskii, Evgenia Khazdan (Moscow: Knizhniki, 2009), 150–66; Shor, “Yuriev-Tartu: Stolitsa evreiskogo studenchestva (1907–1918)” [Yuriev-Tartu as the Jewish students’ capital, 1907–1918], in *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference on Jewish Studies*, Part II / *Materialy Sheshtnadsatoi Ezhegodnoi Mezhdunarodnoi Mezhdistsiplinarnoi konferentsii po iudaïke*, Chast II, ed. Victoria Mochalova, Konstantin Burmistrov, Elena Nosenko-Shtein, Arye Olman, Vladimir Petrukhin, Evgenii Rashkovskii, Evgenia Khazdan, (Moscow: Sefer, 2009), 445–60.

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As with other aspects of Jewish history in Estonia, the study of the Holocaust began as an intimate story told by survivors. Dr. Mark Dworzecki (1908–1975), a physician from Vilna (Vilnius), had gone through five Jewish forced labor camps in Estonia in 1943–44. At the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 he recalled the conditions in the Vilna ghetto, where he had been confined prior to his deportation to Estonia.¹⁸ Dworzecki wrote several books on the history of the Vilna ghetto, and in 1970 he published *White Nights and Black Days: Jewish Camps in Estonia*, available in Hebrew, Yiddish, and French. Dworzecki's personal archive is deposited with the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.¹⁹ In 1960, the Tallinn Jewish congregation sought permission to place a memorial plaque commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, but was rebuked by city authorities.²⁰ It is no surprise, therefore, that it took another twenty-five years for the first Estonian-language book on the Holocaust to appear. Eugenia Gurin-Loov (1922–2001) was one of the founders of the Jewish Cultural Association in Estonia, in 1988, and came to subsequently serve as deputy head of the Estonian Jewish Community. Gurin-Loov followed in the footsteps of her father, Samuel Gurin, who in 1925 assumed the position of director of the Jewish high school in Tallinn. Gurin-Loov spearheaded public commemoration of the Holocaust in Estonia. On May 2, 1989, she delivered a speech in front of few hundred people gathered in the courtyard of the former Jewish high school in Tallinn. She started off with a factual introduction and then continued:

We are talking here of memory, but what specifically do we know? We do not have complete lists; we do not know all those sites where our people were murdered. We do not have memorials: what do we know about Kalevi-Liiva? We do not know where exactly in the woods Pärnu Jews were executed. . . . Now is the time for us to give the victims their dues; their memory should be sacred to us. We do not have to, and can no longer, pass in silence this genocide that was perpetrated against the Jews. For as long as one talks and writes of some abstract "Soviet people" murdered by the Germans in death camps, we should state that they were murdered not because they were Soviet

¹⁸ Watch Dworzecki's deposition from April 5, 1961, at: http://www.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file_num=2133&clip_id=DE43FD50-9990-4F0C-A7C8-644DE6DAB745 (accessed June 2, 2015).

¹⁹ Mark Dworzecki, *Vaise Nekht un Shvartse Teg: Yidn-Lagern in Estonie* [White nights and black days: Jewish camps in Estonia] (Tel Aviv: Tishlia, 1970); *Mahanot ha-yehudim ba-Estonia 1942–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1970).

²⁰ See correspondence between the local Jewish congregation and Tallinn city authorities, December 4, 1968–August 22, 1969, available online at: <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Holocaust/Pamyatnik.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2015).

citizens or “enemies of the people,” no, they were murdered just because they were Jewish. . . . We came here today in order to remind the titular population, the Estonians, that Jewish tragedy also concerns them. Indeed, this was a tragedy also for the people who lived side by side in friendly relationship with Jews, this was a tragedy that took place on Estonian soil . . . Jewish blood was spilled on Estonian soil. Those tortured and murdered rest in Estonian soil. And we hope that the next year, as we gather here again, some representatives of the titular population will join us in our sorrow. We came here to show that we are still alive, that we carry forward the [spirit of] Jewish cultural autonomy, that we stay Jewish, and that our grandchildren will remain Jewish. We bow before the victims and declare: Am yisrael chai [the people of Israel are alive!]²¹

Gurin-Loov delivered on her promise to keep the memory of the murdered Estonian Jews alive by means of her 1994 book, *Suur Häving: Eesti juutide katastroof 1941 / Holocaust of the Estonian Jews, 1941*.²²

Since then, research on the Holocaust in Estonia continued along three tracks. Ruth Bettina Birn came across this subject as part of her job description. At the time Birn was serving as chief historian in the War Crimes Division of the Canadian Justice Department. Among the individuals on her list, Birn was investigating several alleged offenders, mainly Germans, with links to Estonia; her research hence focused on the German Security Police in Estonia and SS personnel in the Jewish forced labor camps in the northeast of the country.²³ In 1998, the Estonian government established a Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, which invested a considerable effort in the study of the mass murder of the Jews. As I argue in the concluding chapter of this book, the tacit objective of the commission was to straighten up Estonia’s historical record in the run up to joining the European Union and NATO. Regardless of this, a team of young Estonian scholars have produced a solid, factual account of the Holocaust in Estonia, which appeared in 2006 as part of the volume, *Estonia, 1941–1945*.

²¹ Text of Eugenia Gurin-Loov’s speech of May 2, 1989, in Tallinn, available online at: http://eja.pri.ee/history/Holocaust/Gurina%20kone_es.html (accessed June 2, 2015).

²² Eugenia Gurin-Loov, Eugenia, *Suur Häving: Eesti juutide katastroof 1941 / Holocaust of the Estonian Jews, 1941* (Tallinn: Estonian Jewish Community, 1994).

²³ Ruth Bettina Birn, “Collaboration With Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe: The Case of the Estonian Security Police,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 2 (2001): 181–96; Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei in Estland 1941–1944: Eine Studie zur Kollaboration im Osten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006); Birn, “Konzentrationslager Vaivara,” in *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, vol. 8 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008), 130–84; Birn, “Vaivara Main Camp,” in *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, ed. Geoffrey P. Megargee, vol. 1B (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009): 1491–1509.

Credit goes in particular to Meelis Maripuu and Riho Västriku.²⁴ My own contribution has been of a purely academic nature, completed as a doctoral dissertation in 2005 and published as a book four years later. Scholarly literature from the past ten or so years lends further credence to the thesis of multiple collaboration that I have advanced in my study. Using the opportunity, though, I want to correct a single factual error that crept into the book. Basing my conclusion on the execution order issued by the German Security Police in Estonia with regard to eight Jews deported to Tallinn from Finland on November 6, 1942, I presumed all of them dead. My Finnish colleagues have subsequently alerted me to the fact that all eight had been deported farther to Auschwitz-Birkenau and one of them, Georg Kollmann, managed to survive—a hypothesis I had earlier rejected. I regret the mistake but take solace in the thought that the Holocaust had consumed one less life.²⁵

Isidor Levin (b. 1919) is one of the few Estonian Jews who not only survived the Holocaust but also committed his life story to paper.²⁶ The major depositories of Holocaust testimony such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, and the University of South California Shoah Foundation have just a handful of accounts related to Estonia, mainly by so-called bystanders. One way or another, the Holocaust generation is nearly gone. Their children and grandchildren—who are sometimes referred to in the United States as “second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors”—however, constitute an important resource yet untapped. To my knowledge, no consistent effort has so far been made in Estonia to record their stories, regret-

²⁴ See relevant chapters by Meelis Maripuu and Riho Västriku in *Estonia, 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*, ed. Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, and Indrek Paavle (Tallinn: Tallinna Raamatutrukikoda, 2006).

²⁵ Cf. Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 214–15, 395–96; Tuulikki Vuonokari, “Jews in Finland During the Second World War” (Research paper: Tampere University, 2003), available online at: <http://www15.uta.fi/FAST/FIN/HIST/tv-jews.html> (accessed June 2, 2015).

²⁶ Isidor Levin, “Minu elu- ja mõttevarast: Meenutusi” [On my life and my thoughts: recollections], *Akadeemia* 7–12 (2009): 1419–40, 1612–32, 1985–2016, 2177–2210, 2385–90; *Akadeemia* 1 (2010): 159–76; Levin, *Minu elu- ja mõttevarast* [On my life and my thoughts] (Tartu: self-published, 2010). Levin was actually born in Latvia, but in 1937 enrolled in the Judaic studies program at the University of Tartu. Professionally, Levin has been associated with St. Petersburg University yet maintained his connections to Estonia. Consequently, in 2012 he received Estonian citizenship on a merit basis.

fully. This lacuna has been filled in part by Centropa, a Jewish historical institute with a head office in Vienna. In existence since 2000, Centropa has conducted over one thousand interviews with elderly Jews across East Central Europe, including twenty-four in Estonia. Among other things, the interviewees talked about their childhood in interwar Estonia, escaping the Nazis in 1941, survival through the Soviet evacuation, the journey back home after the war, antisemitism during late Stalinism, creating a semblance of communal life in the 1950s and 1960s, the refusenik movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and finally reestablishing a Jewish community in independent Estonia.²⁷ Combined with few other existing sources, especially on the persecution of Jews in the early 1950s, it is indeed possible to get an overview, however patchy, of Jewish life in Soviet Estonia.²⁸

The study of Jewish history in Estonia has received a major boost in the form of the Estonian Jewish Museum. Situated in the brand new synagogue building in Tallinn, the museum is a brainchild of Mark Rybak. The idea for a museum can be traced back to Rybak's interest in family history. His ancestors count among the first Jews who permanently settled in Estonia in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1972 Rybak immigrated to Israel, where he made a successful career as a computer engineer. Two of his grandparents perished in the Holocaust, which led him to support the publication of Gurin-Loov's 1994 book. Privately funded, the museum features a permanent exhibition with particular emphasis on Jewish cultural life in interwar Estonia and the community regeneration since 1988. A significant part of the exhibition deals with the Holocaust, augmented by a memorial gallery unveiled in January 2012. For the purpose of doing research, even more significant is the website maintained by Rybak and the Estonian Jewish Museum. The website offers a good selection of academic texts, memoirs, and original documents related to the history of Estonian Jews, most of them available in Estonian, Russian, and/or English translation. Collections of historical images and the photographic

²⁷ Cf. <http://www.centropa.org/search-our-database-jewish-memory> (accessed June 1, 2015). Somewhat unexpectedly, the database for Estonia is as large as that for Latvia and Lithuania combined.

²⁸ Olev Liivik, "The Persecution of Jews in Estonia in the Late 1940s and Early 1950s," in *Estonia 1940–1945*, 405–14; Meelis Maripuu, "Zur sowjetischen Wahrnehmung der Juden in Estland in den Jahren 1944–1963," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 54, no. 1 (2005): 86–97; *Otchet o rabote 2go Kontrrazvedyvatelnogo otdela Komiteta Gosbezopasnosti pri SM ESSR za period 1954–1955 gg.* [Activity report of the 2nd counterintelligence unit of the Estonian KGB for the period 1954–1955] (Tallinn: Estonian Branch State Archives, 1998), 85–88.

chronicle of the Estonian Jewish community complete the museum's website, which is indeed an indispensable resource.

When it comes to scholarship, Anu Põldsam's doctoral thesis on the intellectual legacy of Lazar Gulkowitsch is the biggest achievement to date. Defended at the University of Tartu in late 2011, Põldsam's dissertation is an excellent piece of research in its own right; to begin with, it is uncommon for graduate students in Estonia to use archival sources from five different countries on three continents. It is rather symbolic that Põldsam—who studied with the most prominent Hebraist in Estonia, Kalle Kasemaa—chose to write her thesis on professor Gulkowitsch, the head of the Judaic Studies Department at the University of Tartu. Põldsam regards the chair in Judaic studies at Tartu an ultimate manifestation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as it had evolved in Europe, and specifically Germany, since the early nineteenth century. Only the third dissertation in Judaic studies ever to be written in Estonia, Põldsam's study aims to synthesize Gulkowitsch's ideas by defining his contribution to scholarship as a student of linguistics, religion, and more specifically, Hasidism.²⁹

Despite the natural desire to see the chair in Judaic studies reestablished at the University of Tartu, Põldsam is realistic in her assessment of the current situation.³⁰ I share the view that the academic interest in present-day Estonia is simply not enough to sustain a comprehensive program dedicated to the study of Jewish history, culture, and language. Yet this conclusion gives no reason for pessimism. What we observe today in Estonia is a strong sense of continuity, which compensates for the lack of institutional support. Tatiana Shor picked up where Kopl Jokton, Nosson Genss, and Abe Liebmann left off with their study of Estonian Jewish history in the 1920s and 1930s. Anna Verschik is building upon the legacy of Paul Ariste and his love affair with Yiddish. Anu Põldsam has not only

²⁹ Anu Põldsam, "Lazar Gulkowitsch—eine vergessene Stimme der Wissenschaft des Judentums. Seine Tätigkeit, sein Werk und seine Wirkung im zeitgeschichtlichen Kontext" (PhD diss., University of Tartu, 2011). The two other dissertations are Moses Ziegler's "Das Targum Scheni nach südarabischen Handschriften" from 1937 and Anna Verschik's "Estonian Yiddish and Its Contacts with Co-territorial Languages" from 2000.

³⁰ Anu Põldsam, "Jewish Studies in Estonia: Past and Present," paper delivered at the conference "Exceptional Estonia: Jewish Academic Life and Cultural Autonomy in the Republic of Estonia Between the Two World Wars (1918–1940)," Tel Aviv University, April 10, 2014, available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXNNc2XbKnc> (accessed May 20, 2015).

given Lazar Gulkowitsch his dues but has actually continued in his footsteps. With the enthusiasm and dedication of Mark Rybak, who has built from scratch an entire institution, academic and public interest in Jewish history in Estonia is here to stay, if not grow.

What is most paradoxical about the history of Estonian Jews yet to be written is how widely available the sources are—not just in local archives and libraries, but in the comfort of one's home. As far as access to archives is concerned, the Republic of Estonia has pursued a very liberal policy. With the exception of personal NKVD/KGB files, which require prior permission, archival records in Estonia have been opened to researchers since the early 1990s. Furthermore, in 2004 the Estonian National Archives launched a comprehensive digitization program, which currently comprises over nine million frames. Among the many collections, the Estonian archivists made a particular effort to scan Judaica. The result is truly impressive: out of some 5,000 identifiable files, covering mainly the interwar period, nearly 3,000 have been digitalized. Even more significant, the digital portal Saaga enables researchers to view and download files off-site.³¹ The digitalized files cover Jewish cultural autonomy; numerous cultural, sporting, and welfare organizations; local congregations; schools; and vital information through 1926. Especially well represented are student fraternities and sororities at the University of Tartu, and various educational and professional bodies in Tartu and Tallinn. Among the composite collections that contain records relevant to Jewish history, most significant are the Interior Ministry's files concerning Estonian citizenship, Tartu University student files, and the Soviet deportation records. For a full overview of relevant files available through Saaga, see the annex "Primary Sources on Estonian Jewish History until 1940" in this book.

In terms of further research, the second largest Estonian city and home to a major university in the Baltic, Tartu is a natural candidate for a case study. As is often the case with university centers generally, the history of Tartu—whether it incorporates the Jews or not—is usually told as the story of a city or the story of a university but rarely both. Hence, Jokton in his book focused mainly on the communal life of Tartu Jews, whereas scholars in the post-1991 period have written almost exclusively on Jewish academics. This gap has to be bridged, obviously. Particularly intriguing is that the status of Tartu University as a hub of Jewish secular education had persisted into the 1920s and 1930s, while the center of gravity for

³¹ <http://www.ra.ee/dgs/explorer.php>

Estonians Jews as a minority group had shifted decisively after the Bolshevik Revolution from Tartu to Tallinn. The inquiry may start with the basic question what factors have accounted for this tectonic shift and how rapidly it came to be.

As a centerpiece of Jewish communal life, the synagogue has traditionally attracted the attention of historians and art historians alike. The case of Estonia is no different, generating minor works dealing with the history and architecture of two major houses of worship, in Tallinn and Tartu, as well as a mausoleum in the Jewish cemetery on Magasini Street—none of them any longer in existence.³² Significantly, Judaism lives on in Estonia with the construction of the Tallinn New Synagogue. The first purpose-built Jewish sacral building in Estonia for over a hundred years, the synagogue was inaugurated in May 2007.³³ It would no doubt be worth compiling a history of synagogues in Estonia incorporating smaller structures in provincial cities, especially since blueprints are available from the Tallinn and Tartu archives. The same goes for Jewish cemeteries, which are briefly described in earlier historiography; the Estonian Jewish Museum, among other collections, holds a series of images of Jewish cemeteries and houses of worship across Estonia.

* * *

The essays in this collection span twenty years of research and writing. They reflect not only my own conceptualization of Estonian Jewish history, but also my professional development as an academic. As I describe below, I came across this subject before I enrolled at university, pursued throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, and still expanded on as a career historian.

Who were the Jews who started arriving en masse in present-day Estonia from the mid-nineteenth century onward? Where did they come from and why? How many of them ended up staying permanently, and on what (official) grounds? How did they earn their living and what professions dominated? How did they relate to each other and other ethnic groups?

³² Genss, *Zur Geschichte*; Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 11, 19–20, 26–27, 31–33; Leo Genss, “Estonian Synagogues” undated paper, available online at: http://eja.pri.ee/Religion/leo%20gens%20synagogues_en.pdf (accessed May 20, 2015).

³³ Gennadi Gramberg and Josef Katz, *Tallinna Uus sinagoog / The Tallinn New Synagogue / Tallinnskaia Novaia sinagoga* (Tallinn: Estonian Jewish Community, 2007).

What place did religious and secular education occupy in communal life? Did they conform in their interactions with authorities? The answers to these basic questions form the backbone of chapter 1. Using the border city of Narva as a case study, it effectively maps the identity of a prototypical Jewish community in Estonia. Starting off with an essentially antiquarian approach to history—à la who did what and when—makes sense for a number of reasons. Beginning the story in Estonia's easternmost city—then officially part of St. Petersburg province—is warranted both geographically and chronologically. Coincidentally, it is also the first piece of research on Estonian Jewish history I ever produced, as a BA student back in 1994. By chance, I recently discovered this course paper among my work files. Written twenty years ago, the paper is still relevant. In fact, we are still missing this kind of basic account when it comes to Jewish history in Estonia. This observation thus served as the basis for the present volume. As it appears in the book, chapter 1 has been completely reworked from the original paper, incorporating some new material. The only thing I was unable to change is the scientific apparatus. I had no choice but to uphold the reference system used in eastern Europe in general and Estonia in particular, in accordance with which only the document's provenance is registered, without spelling out the full name and the date of the specific archival record.

Chapter 2 originally appeared in 2009 as an article in *East European Jewish Affairs*, an area studies journal barely known among general historians. This chapter can be safely put in the category of revisionist history, as I am advancing an unorthodox thesis on the origins of Jewish cultural autonomy in Estonia. Contrary to the romantic interpretation that attributes the decision to grant non-territorial autonomy to Jews to the magnanimity of the Estonian state (and indirectly as a testimony to a harmonious coexistence between the titular population and ethnic minorities), I argue that it was rather an unintended consequence of the efforts to appease Baltic Germans and the German State that stood behind them. Otherwise, I do not detect any references to Jews as part of the original conversation on the rights of minorities in Estonia. If anything, the Estonian government proved adamant to sign up to the minorities clause in the Paris Peace Treaty of 1919. In effect, Estonian Jews benefited from power politics waged on both domestic and international levels.

Chapter 3 is adapted from an article in the 1998 volume of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*. Although originally intended for academic publication, it reflects the intellectual horizons of an undergraduate student, which I still was when I wrote it. This particular article/chapter/time pe-

riod under discussion represents the crucial transition from the interwar decades to the years of Nazi occupation, and from a more descriptive narrative to a more argumentative one. After Estonia reemerged from the Soviet rubble as an independent state, the Soviet occupation of 1940–41 at once became the focal point of historical research. With the mass deportation of June 14, 1941, deeply ingrained in the Estonians' DNA, Soviet terror topped the subject list. Whenever Jews were mentioned in this context, it typically underlined the following reasoning. The question at stake was essentially Jews' loyalty to the incapacitated Estonian state. According to an *a priori* thesis, those few Estonians who had subsequently assisted the Nazis in the mass murder of Jews reacted to the latter's role in establishing Soviet rule in the country. A mild version of the so-called Judeobolshevik thesis, there is nothing uniquely "Estonian" about this line of argumentation. Holding Jews partially responsible for their own demise remained a popular theme throughout the territories forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union (i.e., the Baltic states, eastern Poland, and Bessarabia). Keeping this in mind, I inquire what impact Soviet policy has had on the Jewish minority in Estonia. Among the primary sources—until now rarely consulted by researchers specifically with regard to Jews—I make use of NKVD investigation files. My findings run counter to the Judeobolshevik thesis: in proportion to their share in the general population, Jews suffered more, not less, than other ethnic groups, including Estonians. Chapter 3 has been rewritten for the purpose of maintaining a uniform style throughout the volume. In order to avoid repetitions, several paragraphs at the beginning and the end of the original article have been omitted. To compensate, I add a few paragraphs that go to the core of my discussion.

I expand on the theme of Jews having been caught between the Nazis and the Soviets in chapter 4. It is no coincidence that the last name of the main protagonist in this chapter is the same as mine. Helmut Weiss was my paternal grandfather, who wound up in Estonia, freshly, essentially by accident, released from the Gulag. His life and fate echoes many before and after him in the continent where and when Russian Communism and German Nazism confronted each other. An individual life story like his undoubtedly makes it more difficult to speak of clearly defined collectivities such as the Estonian Jewish community, especially in the early decades of the Cold War. Chapter 4 traces its origin to a conference on comparative features of Nazi and communist regimes, held at Lund University in Sweden in late 2011.

The remaining five chapters, in one way or another, deal with the history of the Holocaust, which is my core expertise. Although I focus on Estonia, each of these chapters addresses larger issues within Holocaust studies. Chapter 5 analyzes popular responses to the Nazi mass murder of Jews. In general, qualifying public opinion on a subject as traumatic as this is prone to pitfalls. Within the context of Eastern Europe, the enormous scope of destruction had reduced individual victims to mere statistics. Fortunately, this is not the case in Estonia, where each Jewish victim—963 former citizens of Estonia to be precise—are known by name. The relatively small number of Jews who stayed behind was one of the reasons that made the German Security Police in Estonia decide to unprecedentedly investigate their purported crimes on an individual basis. The police investigation files offer a rare snapshot of ordinary Estonians' views on the detained Jews. The conclusions that I draw in chapter 5, which examines the circumstances of Jews in the capital Tallinn, defy common perceptions of the Holocaust as it played out in the occupied Soviet territories. This piece of research is loosely based on a chapter from my 2009 book, *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust*.

Taken from the same book, chapter 6 completes the chronicle of annihilation in the rest of Estonia. In the case of provincial centers such as Pärnu, Narva, or Rakvere the picture is patchier than it is in the case of Tallinn for the simple reason that fewer police investigation files are available for these cities. The Tartu concentration camp, through which local Jews passed on the way to their deaths, became notorious in no small part thanks to a well-publicized war crimes trial held by Soviet authorities in 1962. Otherwise, the pattern of destruction was similar across Estonia and the occupied Soviet territories at large. Men were arrested and summarily executed first, followed by women and children. In addition to the physical destruction, this chapter also documents the process of confiscation of Jewish property in Estonia.

Chapter 7 examines the final phase of the Holocaust as it evolved in Estonia. In late summer and early fall 1943, the Germans established a wide network of Jewish forced labor camps: up to twenty camps and sub-camps accommodated Jews from the dismantled Vilna and Kovno ghettos. In Estonia, Jews were forced to build defense lines and mine shale oil. While documenting the ordeal of the Jewish camp inmates, the chapter tackles a larger issue in the study of the Holocaust. Brought to Estonia to work, Jews ostensibly had a greater chance of survival. Yet, by the final count, close to 55 percent of an estimated 9,907 Jews perished. The Esto-

nian case thus strikes a middle ground in the discussion on the Nazi policy of extermination through labor versus survival through work. After all is said and done, more Jewish lives were extinguished in Estonia during the last months of Nazi occupation than at any other time between 1941 and 1944. The original version of this chapter appeared in the 2008 volume of *Yad Vashem Studies*.

The crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators became a subject of official investigation in the postwar decades. In Estonia, the two best known war crimes trials took place in 1961 and 1962. Using the example of Estonia, chapter 8 examines the prosecution of war criminals in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. I argue that, by capitalizing on its credentials earned in the fight against Nazi Germany, Moscow waged a successful public relations campaign against the United States. Unburdened by the complexity of public opinion characteristic of a democratic society, the Soviet Union hammered out the message that the West had harbored and connived with war criminals. If it had not been for the ultimate demise of the USSR, it came close to winning the argument. Crucially, the alleged crimes had indeed been committed—specifically against the Jews and Roma—and key perpetrators had escaped justice. This chapter was inspired by a workshop on war crimes trials records from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as a historical source that I co-organized in the summer of 2005 at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

Chapter 9 draws a symbolic line by investigating what people in contemporary Estonia think of the Jews and the Holocaust. In the absence of relevant opinion polls, I turn to the Internet for information. Being aware of potential pitfalls involved in the analysis of online sources, I concur with those who emphasize the significance of the electronic media for the study of radicalism. Specifically, I examine responses of anonymous newspaper readers to Holocaust-related articles. My objective is less to quantify those responses than to identify specific discursive threads. I found unexpectedly high levels of antisemitism among those who choose to express their views on the Holocaust in general and Estonia's share in the Nazi genocide of the Jews in particular. A majority of online commenters tend to situate the Jews in the dichotomous relationship between Soviet and Nazi mass crimes. This tendency effectively reflects the inability to engage in an informed debate, endowed by the protracted experience of undemocratic rule in the previous century. This chapter was originally presented as a paper at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Study in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, where I was a Fellow in 2003. Subse-

quently, the paper was solicited by the editors for publication in the *Journal of Baltic Studies*. The present version incorporates two extra sections: one on hate language and another on Holocaust didactics.

* * *

What does it take to become a Jewish historian? This question is difficult to answer in one sentence. To begin with, the very idea of *Jewish historian* is drastically different in places like the United States, Israel, or Eastern Europe. In North America it normally designates a scholar working on any aspect of Jewish history, whereas in Israel professional interest in the Jewish past typically coincides with ethno-religious self-identification. It gets much more complex when it comes to Eastern Europe, once home to millions of Jews. There is always an element of mystery involved, a story untold. I am afraid it is no different with me.

How many times during my student years people back in Estonia asked me why did I choose to study Jewish history. At first, this question perturbed me a great deal. Would I have been asked the same question had I worked, say, on Renaissance art or the Industrial Revolution, I wondered. After a while, however, it made me contemplate what that moment in space and time was that sparked my interest in a subject not at all obvious for a freshman at an East European University to study in the early 1990s.

In the fall of 1992, a mere year since Estonia regained its independence, I found myself crisscrossing long-abandoned cemeteries in the vicinity of my hometown of Narva. It was more than just curiosity that brought me there. I was on a mission to map what was still remaining of half a dozen cemeteries, some of them dating back to the eighteenth century. This was an assignment I carved out for myself on behest of the city museum where I was working at the time—my first job out of high school. Little remained by the 1990s of the numerous cemeteries lining a popular route out of Narva. German Lutheran, Estonian Lutheran, Polish Catholic, and Russian Orthodox—burial grounds fallen into disrepair with just a handful of relatives around to take care of the graves. The weather and looters helped contribute to the state of desolation. I was nearly finished with my survey, exploring the outlying part of the plot farthest away from the road. All of the sudden, I was staring at massive gravestones carved of limestone, unlike any other I have seen before. Perhaps a few dozen gravestones were still standing, some of them half submerged in the visibly disturbed soil. The gold diggers—whatever they thought they would find in the graves—had no use for the cenotaphs. It was late Octo-

ber, I believe, as thick snow already blanketed the area. Shovelling off the snow, I discovered inscriptions written in a language I could not read. The language and the cemetery were Jewish—it became clear to me. I diligently copied the odd-looking letters into my copybook, took measurements of the gravestones, drew a rough map of the cemetery, and clicked a few photos.

Where it could have all ended instead marked the beginning of a long journey for me. An unexpected discovery kept me thinking. Whereas occasional graves in other denominational cemeteries carried signs of care, in spite of general desolation, the Jewish cemetery was clearly abandoned long ago. Who were the people buried there and why had no-one been attending to their graves? In search of an answer I first turned to my own grandparents. My maternal grandmother was eager to assist. On the photos from her high school graduation back in 1935 she pointed out the Jews among her friends. One of them, Bella Shapiro, I recognized as one of the elderly ladies who occasionally visited my grandmother. Most people of her generation moved elsewhere in Estonia after the war, typically to Tallinn, and Bella was no exception. Grandmother sincerely wanted to help me in my quest. After a routine visit to a local market one day, she alerted me to some books on Jewish history she had seen on offer. I literally ran to the market, as if the books would be snapped up before I could get there. The pale-looking young man was still there selling his wares. One book was *The International Jew* by Henry Ford. If the tenet of Ford's treatise was not immediately clear, another skinny pamphlet flanking it, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, left no doubt.

My paternal grandmother, tongue in cheek, had no qualms questioning my sudden interest in Jewish history. Her husband and my grandfather appeared equally puzzled. And hence lay the revelation. She was arrested in Soviet Estonia in 1941; he went on to serve his ten-year term handed down from Moscow in 1937. They married in the Gulag, and that is where my father was born. Originally my grandfather came from Dresden, betrayed by his heavy Saxon accent. Whenever my childhood friends wondered if my grandfather happened to be a Baltic German, I proudly said he was "real" German. And he was, at heart, in his upbringing, language, and culture.

He also happened to be Jewish, I learned. I always knew him as an unapproachable intellectual who rarely, if ever, spoke of his past. For my grandfather, his Jewishness was dead wood superseded by communist ideology, which he wholeheartedly embraced in his teens. His grandson bringing up the issue he had emotionally and intellectually disposed of

caused a jerk. Did it invalidate his principles or just served as an uncomfortable reminder? I have no chance of knowing, as my grandfather and I never had a proper conversation on the subject. As for me, facing up to grandfather's suppressed origin had only a passing impact—I did not lose sleep over it but neither did it make me reconsider my identity. Of all the possible emotions, it was probably the excitement of discovery that got to me most. Adding another ethnic hue to my already motley pedigree sounded just plain cool. According to the Jewish tradition, lineage is passed through the mother, so even if I wanted to, I could not become a new-born Jew. If there is one allegedly Jewish trait that I have inherited from my grandfather, then it is probably cosmopolitanism.

Returning to my academic quest, in Narva I found popular antisemitic literature to be more accessible than academic works on Jewish history. Help arrived from New Jersey, in the face of Aunt Vera. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the Baltic diaspora reestablishing links to their homeland. Thus, my paternal grandmother reconnected with her childhood playmate who she did not even know was still alive. Having learned of my interest in Jewish history, Aunt Vera picked up a few books from garage sales for me. And so the first ever book on the Holocaust I held in my hands was Susan Zuccotti's *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*. I intentionally say "held," since my reading comprehension of English left a lot to be desired. I gradually improved my English by going through other books sent by Aunt Vera—James Yaffe's *The American Jews* and short stories on Marquis de Lafayette in the American Revolutionary War—together with my grandfather. The impetuosity of youth made me initially decide to skip university in favor of self-education. I soon realized, however, that an unsystematic acquisition of knowledge did not take me very far. Consequently, I enrolled in a history program at the University of Tartu.

One of the first things I did at Tartu was to sign up for a Biblical Hebrew class—the only one on offer—through the Theology Department. As the students in the class one by one explained why they wanted to study Hebrew, I stated I needed it in order to read the Jewish community records from the interwar period. But was I sure the archival sources were actually in Hebrew, asked the instructor. Frankly, I did not know. I showed him the inscriptions I copied from the tombstones in Narva. Of course, they were in Yiddish. I dropped the class: there was no point continuing with Hebrew.

Although by far the best academic repository in the country, the University of Tartu Library had fewer books on Estonian Jewish history than I

expected. The ancient card catalog had perhaps thirty titles in total, mainly articles. The best and most comprehensive proved the sixteen-volume *Evreiskaia Entsiklopedia* published in St. Petersburg between 1908 and 1913. Stuffed with encyclopedias of all kinds—*Brockhaus*, *Meyer*, *Britannica*, and *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia*—the reference literature room became my favorite spot in the library.

A short walk from the library, the Estonian Historical Archives featured a Judaica collection of its own. Those were peculiar books, however: compendia of laws and regulations governing the status of the Jews in the Tsarist Empire. Dry and scholastic, those volumes came in handy when I started working on my first ever piece of research. For two semesters, I locked myself up in the archives, making a pilgrimage to the reading room on the second floor every afternoon after lectures. I felt like a child in a candy store, humbled with the sight and feel of oversized files I had up to that point only seen in museum glass cases. Reveling in the accessibility of archival records, I began researching for my course paper on the history of Jews in Narva up to the Bolshevik Revolution. The initial excitement wore off at the realization that the empirical material was spread across general files. *Tedious* is a mild qualifier to describe the process of going through shelf-meters of police and municipal records in an attempt to document Jewish life in a place normally not associated with it. Nevertheless, by the spring of 1994 I had accumulated quite an extensive amount of material. Working around the clock (writing by hand), I eventually produced a paper I felt proud of. Ticking at forty-two pages and nearly two hundred footnotes, it certainly exceeded the requirements of a typical Senior thesis in an American college.

Rather than Tel Aviv or Tartu, most Jews who once regarded Narva as their home now lived in Tallinn. I managed to establish contact with three of them. All three were happy to talk to me, especially about Jewish life during the interwar period. Mindful of my fateful visit to the abandoned Jewish cemetery in Narva, I prepared a set of questions on burial rites. The oral interviews I conducted served as the basis for my first ever paper, in English, presented at a seminar of young Baltic anthropologists, held in Tartu. In retrospect, it was the last chance to record the memories of my grandparents' generation born around the time of the 1917 Revolution. I met Ilya Dubin, former head of the Narva Jewish community, in hospital. I had to constantly repeat my questions as he kept dozing off. Shortly after the interview I received the news that he had passed away.

Whereas my respondents eagerly reminisced about growing up Jewish in the 1930s, they became tight-lipped when I asked questions about the

Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940–41. Their visible unease can easily be explained by the stigma attached to all things Soviet in Estonia, ultimately linked to mass terror. By that time, however, my interest had transcended the cultural and social history of the 1930s. The superimposition of Soviet rule on Estonia and its impact on the Jews has emerged as a natural extension of my previous research. The Stalinist regime carved a dent in my family history, as it did in the lives of so many Estonian nationals. For answers, I turned to the former KGB archives in Tallinn. There I read the investigation files of the arrested and deported Narva Jews. The Jewish experience under Soviet rule became the subject of my next academic project.

The focus of my study was in part conditioned by practical considerations. As expected, the Jewish communal records from the interwar period deposited at the Estonian National Archives proved to be predominantly in Yiddish, and thus off limits. A preliminary list of archival records pertinent to the Estonian Jewish history I compiled came in handy. Among the new books received by the University of Tartu Library I came across a publication by the St. Petersburg Jewish University, effectively a list of Judaica collections in the former Soviet republics. The list for Estonia contained less than one-half of the available archival records I have been able to identify. The augmented list mailed to the university was reciprocated by an invitation to partake in one of their seminars. Expected to see a massive neoclassical colonnade associated in my mind with a university—like the one at Tartu—the address in St. Petersburg denoted an unremarkable downtown building where the Jewish University rented several apartments on multiple floors. The seminar room appeared even more cramped in the darkness of a winter's day, but spirits were high. A dozen or so students, all markedly older than me, discussed the Torah, Jewish *shtetl*, and the future of Judaic studies in Russia. I had little to contribute on this topic, but was glad to detect interest toward the subject of my own paper, namely Estonian Jews under Soviet occupation of 1940–41. Before heading back to Estonia I met with Isidor Levin—one of the few Holocaust survivors known to be saved by the Estonians.

It was perhaps to be expected that, starting with the second half of the nineteenth century, passing through the early twentieth, and moving into the 1940s, I eventually trained my focus on the Nazi mass murder of Jews. It is also not coincidental that the two individuals who pioneered the study of the Holocaust in Estonia—both amateur historians, both Jewish—are also those to whom this book is dedicated. The first of them has been recognized in Estonia and abroad, while the other is barely known outside of

the city where he lives. Eugenia Gurin-Loov self-published the first ever book on the Holocaust in the Estonian language. The book featured document facsimiles, a short introduction, and most important, a complete list of Estonian Jews who perished in the Holocaust. I met Gurin-Loov at her home in downtown Tallinn overlooking the Estonian Drama Theater. She cut a dignified figure, conscious of her family's contribution to the advancement of Jewish culture in Estonia. I have written a review on Gurin-Loov's book for a Tartu University history journal; it proved one of just two such reviews to appear in Estonia. Gurin-Loov did take issue with my book review, seeing it as criticism of her having downplayed Estonian collaboration in the Holocaust. This I did not argue.

A few months later I had a meeting with someone as dedicated to the cause as Gurin-Loov. The contrast could not have been starker. From a patrician apartment filled with antique oak furniture in the heart of Tallinn I was transferred to a moldy living room in a standard two-story apartment block built by German prisoners of war in Sillamäe, not far from Narva. Unlike Gurin-Loov, who used to teach at a college, Boris Lipkin spent his life working in a factory. His sister lost her health manning a production line in the same factory, a secretive installation which was a part of the Soviet nuclear program. Never married, they lived together in a dilapidated one-bedroom apartment. During the Nazi occupation, the area within a thirty kilometer radius from Sillamäe was dotted with Jewish forced labor camps. Lipkin took it upon himself to map the former camp sites in the vicinity of the city. He had never set foot in any archives; instead he interviewed elderly farmers in the area who might recall those camps. The eyewitness testimonies he collected, and the crude maps that he drew from their words ended up in a local museum and were later printed in part as newspaper articles. He was tremendously happy to take me with him on site, to tell me about his volunteer work. He was interested to know about my efforts to study Jewish history. Among other things I remember him asking me about the difference between Yiddish and Hebrew . . . Boris Lipkin and Eugenia Gurin-Loov: two very different individuals (needless to say, they had probably never heard of each other), who found a common cause on behalf of the victims of the Holocaust and humanity at large.

When talking to my maternal grandmother sometime after having visited several sites of the former Jewish forced labor camps, I had to confront yet another family secret. Grandmother instinctively lowered her voice (she repeated the mantra that one never knew what the future might hold) when she confided in me. Between 1918 and 1944 her family ran a

farm, located in the area where the Nazis later dumped the Jews. Both her brothers served in the Estonian auxiliary police, *Omakaitse* or Self-Defense, during the Nazi occupation. One of them was in charge of food supplies to the Jewish forced labor camp at Viivikonna. On several occasions he abused his position by bringing a handful of Jews from the camp to help work in the fields. Grandmother emphasized that while on their farm, the Jews were treated well: they also got some potatoes and few warm clothes to take with them back to the camp. After the war he stood trial and consequently got five years of forced labor. Jewish survivors, according to grandmother, had nothing bad to say about either of her brothers. The historian in me has commanded that I verify my grandmother's information against the criminal investigation file of her brother. He was primarily accused of hunting down and killing Soviet parachutists; one of his co-defendants claimed that my great-uncle had tricked the Jews in swapping gold items for bread, though that did not feature in the judgment.

In the reference section of the Tartu University Library I came across a volume listing major volunteer and charitable associations in the world. From the long list I chose a dozen or so organizations, from which I then inquired if they could possibly sponsor my archival trips to Tallinn. Only a few of them bothered to reply, offering no travel grant but merely commending my research on the history of Jews in Estonia. The piece on the Soviet occupation of Estonia and the Jews that I had written, I decided, should be published in an academic journal. The name of the journal, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* published by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, sounded just right to send my draft article to. The polite note addressed to "Professor Weiss-Wendt" that acknowledged the reception of the article I took as a proof of acceptance for publication. Although over the years I have received more "noes" than "yeses," the very fact of trying came in my favor when I submitted an application for a Fulbright scholarship.

There was no doubt in my head that, as far as the study of the Holocaust is concerned, the best place to be was the United States. Eagerly anticipating the final decision on my application, I suddenly received a communication from the Fulbright Commission in Estonia, concerning a different subject. Among other things, I indicated in my application that I have been doing research on both Soviet and Nazi mass crimes. A Fulbright officer told me that she has confidentially passed this information to the U.S. Justice Department and that, as long as I did not mind, I might soon hear directly from them. I was intrigued to say the least. Indeed,

shortly I received a call from Washington, DC. A gentleman explained the nature of the request by the Office of Special Investigation (OSI) that he represented. This particular unit within the U.S. Justice Department was tasked with investigating allegations of war crimes against certain individuals who had immigrated to the United States from Europe after the Second World War. The alleged war criminals on the OSI lists were mainly Germans and East Europeans, among them a few Estonians. The OSI was looking for a qualified historian who could speak local languages. That scholar would then comb through local archives, looking for potential incriminating evidence. Without hesitation, I said I was to assist, pending the decision of the Fulbright Commission. For its part, the Justice Department was willing to wait to see if I was awarded the fellowship. So it happened and, two years later I joined the club of Holocaust historians, including Raul Hilberg and Christopher Browning, who at different times and in different capacities took part in the investigation of war crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. My task was fairly simple, namely to check if any of a half dozen Estonians on the list could be pinned down to crimes against the civilian population, specifically the Jews. I was able to trace them down to particular police units, but the smoking gun was missing. None of those cases ended up in court, presumably having been closed for a lack of evidence.

Leaving Estonia for the United States proved easier than it might have otherwise been. Upon learning that I was joining a graduate program in Jewish history with a focus on the Holocaust at an American university, my senior peer at the Estonian Historical Archives suggested I did it “for money.” However absurd a proposition, I felt jittery all the same: how on earth could money be made from studying the genocide of the Jews? Upon landing in America—what could only be a dream come true for my grandfather and father—my first short trip was to the Holocaust Memorial Museum. The museum building, the permanent exhibition, the staff at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies—it was nothing short of a revelation.

The transition from Tartu University to New York University, however, turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. Eager to learn Yiddish, I was reminded by my graduate supervisor David Engel that the name of the department was *Hebrew* and Judaic Studies. The entire program, it seems, was geared toward all things Israel. The mismatch between my expectations and the departmental requirements was obvious. I felt like an outsider who had to prove his Jewish credentials, which I simply did not have. My passion and academic curiosity ended in the devas-

tated Europe of 1945. The only piece of advice that David Engel had for me and my pursuit of the study of the Holocaust in the Baltic region was to read each and every account written by the survivors of the Jewish ghettos. In retrospect, the brightest memory of my two years at NYU was the graduate seminar taught by the late Tony Judt in the History Department.

For a while, I thought the problem was with me. The summer school in Jewish history at the Central European University in Budapest halfway through my Master's studies made me reconsider. Featuring such scholars as Michael Silber and Ezra Mendelsohn of the Hebrew University, Michael Stanislawski of Columbia University, and Hillel Kieval of George Washington University, their style and the whole demeanor was markedly different from the one espoused by David Engel. I realized that I had no future at NYU and had to move on. Some of the issues involved in the process of applying for a doctoral program in the United States I intended to discuss with Ezra Mendelsohn, a Brooklyn native, in Jerusalem the following month.

After visiting the Holocaust Museum on the National Mall, the next destination on my list was Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Three weeks spent in Israel in August 1998 was a strange experience overall. My first impression of Israel was tainted by a plainclothes policeman who confronted me in the arrival area of Ben Gurion International Airport. "You came here for drugs," he bluntly announced, and took me for a full-body search. "You are telling me you are staying in Israel for nearly a month and only have a small backpack with you?" he barked at me. After every inch of me had been carefully inspected, he waived me off, no apology issued. From the customs office I made my way to Al-Ahram hostel in Old Jerusalem, selling bunk beds on the rooftop for an equivalent of \$11 per night.

Professionally, I gained little from my research stay in Israel. In terms of primary sources, all that I have got from Yad Vashem were Israeli police investigation files and odd survivor testimonies. The museum, no doubt impressive, mainly appealed to emotions (the grand new museum building, which opened in 2005, has introduced an important corrective). In the far corner of museum's bookshop, to my surprise, I discovered a dusty copy of Mark Dworzecki's *Jewish Camps in Estonia*, the original Yiddish-language edition from 1970 and the first ever book on the Holocaust in Estonia. Among the museum staff I met quite a few immigrants from the former Soviet Union. One of them, an energetic and jovial lady who came originally from Riga, kindly invited me for dinner at her place. Her windows opened on a Palestinian settlement, and the apartment itself

was situated in East Jerusalem. To my question on how she felt living in an occupied territory, she shrugged her shoulders: what was I talking about! Some of her colleagues at Yad Vashem found it strange that I chose to stay in the Arab Quarter. I patiently explained that three-quarters of the fellowship that I received I spent on air tickets, that the Arab Quarter was the most authentic part of Old Jerusalem, and that I did not quite understand the nature of their question altogether.

Back from Israel, I applied to four or five doctoral programs, and was accepted into two: general studies at the University of Chicago and Near Eastern and Judaic studies at Brandeis University. It was no brainer, really. Ezra Mendelsohn at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as well as some of my fellow students had only good things to say about Brandeis. Choosing Brandeis was indeed one of the best things that ever happened to me. Founded near Boston in 1948 as a secular Jewish university, Brandeis was tacitly meant to accommodate students who had been denied entry to schools like Harvard due to latent antisemitism. With some 60 percent of the student body Jewish, Brandeis used to have a nickname “Jew-U.” This, however, has changed somewhat, as the university has been trying to foster a truly global appeal. That is why it felt so easy to fit in: I had no need of proving anything to anyone, except my academic proficiencies of course. Next to a reflecting pool on the Brandeis campus is a small Holocaust memorial. The stone stele has the names of major sites of Nazi mass murder carved on it, among them Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, Babi Yar in Ukraine, Ponary (Paneriai) in Lithuania, Rumbula in Latvia, and also Klooga in Estonia. After two years of writing, six years of doing archival research, and over a decade of contemplating it, in 2005 I graduated with a dissertation on local collaboration in the Holocaust in Estonia. The book with the same title, *Murder Without Hatred*, was published four years later by Syracuse University Press.

The reaction to the book in Estonia has been a huge disappointment. I expected debate, informed discussion, but instead got a shot of vitriol. To my knowledge, no academic journal in Estonia printed a review of the book. Two newspaper articles was all there was. Olaf Mertelsmann in *Sirp*—taking cues from the book’s subtitle, *Estonians and the Holocaust*—claimed that I had extrapolated the guilt of the few onto the entire Estonian nation. Pekka Erelt in *Eesti Ekspress*, Estonia’s biggest tabloid, plainly stated that “Weiss-Wendt hates Estonians.” Like Mertelsmann, he glossed over the eleven chapters based on empirical material and went straight into the conclusion, in which I had advanced a psycho-cultural theory of criminal collaboration. Never mind the insinuations made by

contributors, the online commentaries by newspaper readers churned my stomach. Internet commentators competed with each other in fantasizing an appropriate punishment such as kicking me in the teeth, putting me in a cage, revoking my university diploma, and stripping me of Estonian citizenship. Among that, a “Jew boy from Narva” belonged among milder comments. The final nail in the coffin was when among anonymous readers I identified an estranged distant relative, who used his first name. My second cousin, who was serving time for embezzlement, wrote something to the effect that he saw my “moral degradation” coming. Needless to say, none of the internet users who chose to comment on the book had actually read it, or would have read it for that matter.

I confess those were a rough few days, making me contemplate just how vicious the attack was, essentially a character assassination. I was told I was wrong, yet no new sources were introduced and no counter argument advanced. What helped me to regain my composure was the realization that the thrust of criticism was not just absurd and/or grotesque but actually postmodern. Ereht scorned me by saying, among other things, that I had “muddied the waters” for sometime already. He apparently meant my earlier article in the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, in which I analyzed Estonians’ perceptions of the Jews and specifically the Holocaust through the medium of the Internet. Ironically, the smear campaign to which I was subjected further proved my earlier findings. Namely, I was arguing that the culture of debate as such was missing in Estonia, and a significant proportion of Estonians still held a black-and-white view of their recent history.

Was it all in vain, then? Whatever I have written on the history of Jews in Estonia: Has it had any effect insofar as the public response appears to have been negative through and through? Whenever a dark thought like this cuts through my mind, I mentally return to the equally gloomy day in the fall of 1992 when I came upon the desecrated Jewish cemetery. It was worth it, by all means!

CHAPTER 1

New in Town: Jews in Narva, 1874–1917

The landscape of ethnic history in Estonia is rather uneven. Germans, Swedes, and Russians had consecutively constituted the ruling class of present-day Estonia. The dominant status of these ethnic groups is reflected in the number of studies dedicated to each of them. Due to the well-established German academic tradition, coupled with the organized resettlement of the entire ethnic group beginning in the fall of 1939, Baltic Germans have received by far the biggest amount of attention in literature; primary research on the other two minorities have picked up in the wake of Estonia's independence in 1991. When it comes to Poles, Tatars, Roma, and Jews—numerically weak minorities who have settled in Estonia relatively recently—the picture is very different. Nowhere is the knowledge gap bigger than in the early history of these minorities in Estonia. Insofar as the chronicle of Jewish life remains sketchy even for the two largest cities, Tallinn and Tartu, it is a mere footnote for the rest of Estonia. To correct this misbalance I chose to do a case study of a provincial city.

Narva is a fascinating subject for research. Perched on the right bank of Narva River, the city has forever been on the crossroads between East and West. The borders have moved across the river over time, but the sense remains that Narva is the first stop on the way from Russia to Europe. The Baltic provinces of Estonia, Livonia, and Courland became part of the Russian Empire as a result of the Great Northern War fought in the early eighteenth century. Narva and its environs belonged administratively to the St. Petersburg province and judicially to the Estonian province. According to the 1881 census, the population of Narva stood at slightly over ten thousand, divided between four boroughs: City (*gorodskaja/linna*) Ivan (*ivanovskaia/jaanilinna*), and combined Peter/Narva (*petrovskaja/peetri/narvskaja*). The population of the city was

mixed, Estonian-Russian, with Russian as a lingua franca by the 1890s. The share of ethnic Estonians dramatically increased in the wake of the construction of cotton mills in 1857. The time frame chosen for this case study reflects city history more than it does specifically Jewish history. In 1874, the Russian City Charter regulating citizenship rights and levying dues was extended to include Narva. Following the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia, by a direct vote held in December 1917, Narva was fully incorporated in what soon became independent Estonia.¹

My study of the history of the Jews in a certain geographical location is essentially ethnographic. The questions I am asking are basic, for the simple reason that they have never been posed before. How did Jews end up in a place like Narva? Where did they come from? What status did they have in their adopted city? I view the Jewish minority in Narva first and foremost as a subject of Russian imperial policymaking, which gears my focus toward the interaction between the Jews and local authorities. The relationship between various ethnic groups within a single city is much more difficult to map due to the limited archival sources. In the absence of community records, researchers are bound to use official documentation. Empirical material for this particular case study comes from the following three collections deposited in the Estonian Historical Archives in Tartu: Narva Local Government, 1858–1917; Narva City Police Authorities, 1895–1918; and Narva City Police Department, 1811–1891. Alongside individual records that addressed specific issues involving Jews, the Narva police authorities maintained files dealing specifically with the local Jewish population. Whereas such a practice was common in all municipalities where Jews resided, sometimes “Jewish files” might contain just one document. The available sources do not allow me to situate the Jewish experience in Narva in the broader context of Estonian Jewish history, let alone pan-European Jewish history. After all, even those documents I do have at my disposal point to a rather autonomous existence of Jews in the border city. In any event, the notion of *Estonian Jewish community* has not yet crystalized during the time period under scrutiny.

Neither can one speak of “East European Jewry” prior to the ascent of the nation-state. What now constitute the independent states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the eighteenth century came under the

¹ Anton Weiss-Wendt, “Komu prinadlezhit Narva? K voprosu o territorialno-administrativnoi prinadlezhnosti goroda 1858–1917 gg.” [Who does Narva belong to? Toward the question of the city’s territorial and administrative status in 1858–1917], *Baltiiskii Arkhiv: Russkaia kultura v Pribaltike* 3 (1997): 22–46.

rule of the Russian Empire. Until the Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 there were virtually no Jews in the tsarist state. Initially welcomed in the realm, Jews soon became subject to restrictive legislation, specifically on freedom of movement. Neither the St. Petersburg nor Estonian province belonged to the so-called Pale of Settlement, which was effectively introduced by Empress Catherine II in December 1791. According to the imperial edict, Jews were allowed to settle exclusively within the prescribed area. The provinces of Courland and Livonia, as well as the autonomous Kingdom of Poland (until its incorporation into the empire in 1863), however, were included in the Pale. Hence the whim of tsarist authorities weighed on the geography of Jewish settlement, determining a different trajectory for Jewish history in the contemporary Baltic states.

Classic historiography postulates a relentless assault by the Russian state on Jews motivated by traditional antisemitism and a fear of economic competition. During the last three decades a more complex picture has emerged. Historians such as Michael Stanislawski have pointed out that the tsarist authorities had never been consistent in handling the legal and political status of Jews in the empire. Treatment of the Jewish minority was beseeched with contradictions, ingrained in the recognition of Jews as both the collectivity and the estate. Besides, argues Stanislawski, it is not even clear that Russian autocrats viewed Jews as a major problem—contrary to popular perceptions.² My account takes a middle ground, emphasizing the incoherent nature of policymaking vis-à-vis Jews, yet identifying the Jewish population as a specific target of discrimination.

Jewish Population Statistics

During the second half of the nineteenth century Russian legislation concerning Jews had become less rigid. Thus, from 1865 onward Jewish artisans and craftsmen received the right to settle anywhere within the expanse of the Tsarist Empire. Six years earlier, permission to live and trade also outside the Pale of Settlement was granted to Jewish merchants of the First Guild. Beginning in 1867 the same rule applied to Jewish conscripts and their families, upon the completion of a mandatory fifteen-year ser-

² Cf. Michael Stanislawski, "Russian Jewry, the Russian State, and the Dynamics of Jewish Emancipation" in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 262–83.

vice.³ By 1881, the number of Jews in the Russian Empire was estimated at slightly over four million. Out of that number, no more than fifty-four thousand resided outside the Pale, mainly in St. Petersburg and Moscow.⁴ As of 1874, there were 104 Jews living in Narva, none of them in Peter borough. By estate, Jews were divided as follows: petty bourgeoisie (32 men and 26 women); retired servicemen together with their families (21 and 14); and soldiers on active duty (11).⁵

The statistics reproduced in Table 1.1 should be treated with caution. To begin with, the number of Jews entered in individual police reports does not match with the aggregate data. Figures align only for the years 1874, 1877, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1903, and 1909. To account for discrepancies, Table 1.2 provides a corrective.

Discrepancies in Jewish population statistics are quite substantial, starting from one person in 1880 to 51 in 1907. Sometimes local and central statistics were worlds apart. For example, the 1881 census found 157 Jews in Narva, whereas the figure calculated on the basis of archival sources was 270 or even 282, that is, 45 percent higher than the official. If one had to choose, data collected by police officers in individual boroughs appears more reliable than the general statistics. By default, policemen must have had a good overview of the people, Jews in particular, residing in their respective precincts. Otherwise, Jews were not the only population group that fell between the statistical cracks. According to Priit Pirsko, estimates presented by local authorities could differ from the actual figures by as much as 30 percent, a fact acknowledged even by Central Statistics Office officials. This disparity was mainly due to the faulty calculation of population growth, which in turn had to do with illegal migration.⁶

³ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* [Collected laws of the Russian Empire], second edition, vols. 34 (no. 34248) and 40 (no. 42264) (St. Petersburg, 1830–84); *Evreiskaia Entsiklopedia* [Jewish encyclopedia], vol. 7 (St. Petersburg, 1907–13), 595. When the so-called cantonist system was first expanded to include Jews in 1827, conscripts were required to serve in the Russian Army for twenty-five years. For standard works on Jewish Cantonists, see Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983) and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴ Figures from John D. Klier, “Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Pogroms,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

⁵ Estonian Historical Archives (hereafter: EAA), 849/1/281, 98.

⁶ Priit Pirsko, “Virumaa rahvastik 19. sajandi teisel poolel” [Viru province population in the second half of the 19th century] (MA Thesis, University of Tartu, 1992), 11–12.

Those Jews who were found to have violated domicile rules had anywhere between three days and one month to leave the city. In the formal case the offense could be, for example, missing the deadline for presenting papers proving status of an artisan—a prerequisite for acquiring a residence permit.⁷ The transgressions that could prompt an expedited expulsion included, but were not limited to, the lack of valid residence papers, or engaging in other kind of workmanship from that allowed.⁸ Sometimes statistics had a subjective element to it, which is hard to interpret otherwise. For instance, the 1909 list of Narva Jewish residents had 581 names on it. When reporting to the St. Petersburg provincial government, however, the Narva police chief cited the figure 586.⁹

Table 1.1 Jewish Population Statistics in Narva by estate, 1874–1909

Year	Nobility	Merchants	Petty Bourgeoisie	Peasants	Retired soldiers and their families	Soldiers' wives and their children	Soldiers on active duty	Total men and women	Grand total
1874	-	-	32/26	-	21/4	-	11	66/40	104
1875	-	-	45/39	-	29/13	-	7	81/52	133
1876	-	-	29/17	-	36/19	-	9	74/36	110
1877	-	-	48/39	-	2/1	4/3	-	72/52	124
1878	-	-	51/43	-	17/11	-	19	87/54	141
1879	-	-	50/44	-	16/12	-	46	113/52	165
1880	-	-	42/54	-	29/15	-	17	88/69	157
1881	-	-	96/105	-	21/20	-	28	145/125	270
1883	-	-	109/116	-	24/15	-	62	195/131	326
1884	-	-	105/111	-	27/17	-	56	188/128	316
1885	-	-	108/118	-	47/23	-	90	245/141	386
1886	-	-	112/121	-	59/47	-	56	227/168	395
1887	-	-	100/115	-	57/51	-	56	213/166	379
1903	-	3/4	168/148	3/4	25/12	-	160	360/167	527
1907	1/1	5/4	118/120	2/3	26/12	-	163	315/140	455
1908	1/1	7/12	166/160	4/5	32/23	-	183	387/201	589
1909	-	6/4	170/172	6/5	29/14	-	169	380/195	575

Source: EAA, 849/1/281; 849/1/39; 849/1/59; 849/1/279; 849/1/61; 849/1/285; 849/1/62; 849/1/283; 849/1/284; 849/1/285(II); 849/1/286; 849/1/288; 849/1/289; 633/1/29; 633/1/62; 633/1/69; 633/1/85. The grand total is given after a composite database “On Population of the City of Narva and Its Environs.”

⁷ EAA, 633/1/96, 82.

⁸ EAA, 633/1/24, 22; 633/1/18, 83.

⁹ EAA, 633/1/65, 53.

The statistical data in Table 1.2 indicates a continual increase of the Jewish population in Narva, except for a few years. Until 1887 the average annual growth was in excess of 7 percent. For the years 1903–13 the absolute numbers fluctuated between 10 and 14 percent, whereas the figures for 1903 and 1913 remained practically constant. Due to severe mobility limitations, general patterns effectuating changes in population size and structure did not apply to the Jews in the exact same manner as they did to other ethnic groups. Thus, the size of the Jewish population was affected neither by the establishment of the Krenholm cotton mill nor by the construction of a Tallinn-St. Petersburg railway. The Jews could not legally join the factory workforce while the pool of Jewish workers and well-to-do merchants who might otherwise have contributed to the building of the railway was simply too low. Population statistics for the whole city further disaffirm any common patterns. Whereas the entire population of Narva increased by 34 percent for the period 1873–83 the Jewish share grew by a staggering 323 percent. For the subsequent period of 1883–97, however, the tendency was reversed, 248 versus 28 percent. Between 1897 and 1913 the Jewish population growth in Narva stabilized at 12 percent whereas the general population growth stagnated.

Table 1.2. Adjusted Jewish Population Statistics in Narva, 1874–1913

1874	1875	1875	1876	1876	1877	1878	1878	1879	1879
104	118	133	121	110	124	138	141	162	165

1880	1880	1881	1881	1881	1883	1883	1884	1885	1886
158	157	282	270	157	347	326	316	386	395

1887	1897	1903	1907	1907	1908	1908	1909	1909	1913
379	461	527	606	455	610	589	575	581	523

Source: Eiki Berg, "The Peculiarities of Jewish Settlement in Estonia," *GeoJournal* 33, no. 4 (August 1994): 465–70; Raimo Pullat, *Eesti linnad ja linlased* (Tallinn: Eesti raamat, 1972), 60; EAA, 633/1/65, 46–50.

Borough-by-borough statistics indicate that Jews predominantly settled in the downtown area and the quarters on the opposite side of the river. In effect, Jews were evenly split between City and Ivan boroughs. It was not until 1879 that the first Jew, officially registered as petty bourgeois, moved to Peter borough. It should be added, though, that

servicemen—who until the end of the nineteenth century did not make it into the general statistics—mainly stayed in City borough since the regiment where they belonged was stationed exactly there.¹⁰ That may be reason why in the 1900s the two-thirds of the local Jewish population officially resided in City borough. All but one merchant, for example, lived in the historical core or Ivan borough; peasants stayed in City borough, and beginning in 1908 also in Peter/Narva boroughs. Two individuals appearing in the category of nobility for the year 1907 and 1908 also settled in downtown.

This statistical overview prompts a few generalizations. The fewest number of Jews were registered for Peter and Narva boroughs. Predominantly settled by ethnic Estonians, these two neighborhoods attracted neither merchants nor servicemen on indefinite leave and their families, though a few peasants. Presumably, Jews categorized as peasants might find it easy to interact with the majority population comprised of “simple folks.” The same might not be true for merchants, who belonged to a higher social class. The issue of prestige and apt opportunities for doing business were the likely reasons that prompted the “noblemen” and merchants to live in Narva downtown. A bit more difficult to pinpoint is the logic behind the settlement pattern among retired servicemen, soldiers on indefinite leave, and their families. Until 1887 most of them resided in either City or Ivan boroughs, with only few in Narva/Peter boroughs. From 1903 onward, however, the Jews of military profession and their descendants lived almost exclusively in City borough.

What is striking about the data presented in Table 1.3 is the relatively low mortality rates, which Peter Haller has observed also among the Catholic population. The mortality rates were one-third to one-half higher among Jewish men than women. This tendency had persisted into the twentieth century. The total number of marriages, despite the general increase in the Jewish population, remained static. An average of fifteen children who were born each year made up about 2.6 percent of the total growth. For the period since 1901 statistics show only two children born out of wedlock. Rosa Shapiro was the name of the girl born in 1902.¹¹ As a matter of comparison, I added vital statistics for 1918 and 1919. Even though the number of marriages increased following the Bolshevik takeover, the number of newborns dropped to its lowest.

¹⁰ In 1862–69 it was the Omsk regiment, then the Yenisei regiment, and from 1880 onward the Pechersky regiment.

¹¹ EAA, 849/1/299, 40.

Table 1.3. Jewish Vital Statistics in Narva, 1875–1909

	1875	1877	1878	1880	1881	1882	1883
Marriages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Births	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deaths	4	5	1	6	3	3	5
Natural increase	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1884	1885	1886	1887	1901	1902	1903
Marriages	-	-	-	-	3	1	3
Births	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
Deaths	4	8	7	6	3	3	4
Natural increase	-	-	-	-	10	11	12
	1904	1905	1906	1907	1909	1911	1912
Marriages	2	3	4	3	3	0	6
Births	9	14	28	15	14	15	12
Deaths	6	9	4	3	6	2	8
Natural increase	3	5	13	12	8	13	4
	1913	1914	1915	1915	1917	1918	1919
Marriages	4	2	2	6	8	2	4
Births	21	16	11	13	12	9	2
Deaths	5	7	3	11	-	-	-
Natural increase	16	9	8	2	-	-	-

Source: EAA, 849/1/57; 849/1/282; 849/1/61; 849/1/285; 849/1/283; 849/1/284; 849/1/286; 849/1/288; 849/1/289; 849/1/298; 849/1/300; 849/1/301; 849/1/302; 849/1/304; 849/1/65; 5417/1/1; 5417/1/2; 5417/1/3; 5417/1/4; 5417/1/5; 5417/1/6; 5417/1/7; 5417/1/8; 5417/1/9; 5417/1/10; 5417/1/11; 5417/1/12; 5417/1/13; 5417/1/14; 5417/1/22; 5417/1/23; 5417/1/24; 5417/1/25; 5417/1/26; 5417/1/27. Peter Haller, *Biostatistik der Stadt Narva nebst Vorstädter und Fabriken in den Jahren 1860–1885* (Dorpat/Tartu, 1866), 99. Mortality statistics derived from the standard form “On Jews,” which was sent on the annual basis to the city government by St. Petersburg Statistics Office. The reports covered such diverse subjects as animal husbandry, factories, Old Believers, and so on. For some reason, the Tsarist Government was only interested to know about the dead Jews. From the early twentieth century onward Jewish mortality statistics were incorporated into general population statistics.

Surveillance of the local Jewish population was carried out by two institutions: St. Petersburg provincial government and Narva city police authorities. The former determined the duration of residency for individual arrivals and decided on the issues pertaining to non-Christian denomi-

nations in general. The latter kept close watch over incoming and departing Jews and compiled vital statistics.¹² Civil registry books, which had been introduced in the case of Jews as early as 1835, did not exist in Narva until 1911. The reason for this omission was simple: a so-called crown rabbi (Russian: *kazennyi evrei*), whose main task was keeping the books, settled down in the city only then.¹³ As a matter of fact, Jewish birth registry had been in place in Narva at least since 1868, run by a rabbi who was not officially approved by the state.¹⁴ Unfortunately, all these books perished in a fire that broke out in rabbi Feigelsohn's apartment at some point in the 1880s.¹⁵

Business Not as Usual

To get an introduction into the world of Jewish business in Narva one may look at the two trader lists from 1872 (Table 1.4). Out of the thirty-seven names on the first list, twelve belonged to Jews. The second register specifically listed book vendors, twelve of whom, that is, one-fourth of the total, were Jewish.¹⁶

A majority of Jewish businessmen in Narva were shopkeepers. Salomon Mitzengendler in 1882–90 rented from the city a weigh house.¹⁷ The stock exchange building on the city hall plaza featured a few storefronts; at different times between 1894 and 1916 Sender Rubanovich, Israel Lewer, Girsh Usharov, J. P. Ofrill, P. Girshovich, and G. Abramovich were among the renters. The shop right behind the weigh house was rented by Abram Usharov. By 1898 all these establishments had been converted into meat shops, with Mitzengendler as one of the owners. In 1906 a meat shop rental agreement signed Hait, and in 1908 Abram Gorfinkel. In 1914 a similar agreement secured Berka Berson and Leiba Jossif Donits, and in 1916 Ariel Schnee. One of the four apartment and basement renters in the city-owned building no. 40 was Samuel Girshovich and later Lewer.

¹² A. N. Gusev, *Zakony o evreiakh: Sbornik izvlechenii iz svoda zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii deistvuiushchikh o evreiakh postanovlenii* [Laws concerning Jews] (Kharkov, 1889), 10.

¹³ EAA, 849/1/96, 21.

¹⁴ EAA, 849/1/28, 178.

¹⁵ EAA, 849/1/658, 72.

¹⁶ EAA, 3070/1/840, 6, 10. Although the lists are undated, the year of compilation can be established with the help of secondary documents.

¹⁷ EAA, 849/1/252, 3; 849/1/255, 3.

Table 1.4 Trader Lists, 1872

Gabriel Segamovich	David Blondes
Leiser Hait	Nesse Goffmann
Salomon Inerfeldt	Gabriel Segamovich
Abe Leibovich	Sofia Mejerovich
Girsh Mejerovich	Zelik Bristin
Movsha Abramovich	Abe Leibovich
Girsh Breharov	Movsha Abramovich
Leiba Haitov	Wolf Rosenberg
Samuel Goffmann	Israel Tonne
Samuel Rosenberg	Leiba Hait
Movsha Ratsek	Leiba Deutsch
Salomon Mitzengendler	Movsha Ratsek
	Salomon Mitzengendler
	Movsha Rafelsohn
	Anna Hoffenberg
	Esther Ofreid

Opportunities for street trading increased in the late 1890s, as temporary shops behind the weigh house went to higher bidders, among them R. Girshovich and Vera Rosenberg. Another option was renting so-called mobile stalls, to which Berson, I. Rosenberg, Lewer, Usharov, Hait, Blondes, Hana Leiba, Nesse Goffmann, and Sender Rubanovich availed themselves. Along with the mobile stalls, the municipality leased two booths on Romanov Boulevard and Baltic Street respectively, both of which went to Benjamin Mikhailovsky. In 1907 permanent vegetable stalls went up on the city hall plaza; among the traders who took their chances were Isaak Rosenberg, Girsh Shapiro, and Rebecca Girshovich. Yet the most unpretentious place in Narva to do petty trading proved the city market. One can also get an idea what “miscellaneous” trading actually referred to: Abram Gruns and I. Goffmann sold hats and caps, while Frank and Co., I. Schnee, Liba Stein, Rachel Maslovsky, Sofia Gruns, and Haim Zehnstein sold used clothes.¹⁸

As to the quality of what was on sale, one police officer gave an idea by describing the scraps of cloth traded by Stein as “crap.”¹⁹ Neither did petty trade generate much profit for the sellers. In consideration of that,

¹⁸ EAA, 849/1/34; 849/1/38; 849/1/44; 849/1/50; 849/1/55; 849/1/56; 849/1/62; 849/1/75–84; 849/1/260–62; 849/1/276–80; 849/1/407; 849/1/410; 849/1/480; 849/1/481; 849/1/483–85; 849/1/489; 849/1/491; 849/1/494; 849/495; 849/1/498; 849/1/500; 849/1/504. When advertising his business in 1932, Abram Gruns stated it was established in 1879. See *Põhja Kodu* (Narva), March 15, 1932.

¹⁹ EAA, 849/1/1114, 224.

Blondes even got some financial relief when the rent he was paying for his booth went down. Lewer had to shut down his business altogether, citing consistent losses.²⁰ With such a pitiful state of affairs, some tried to earn their daily bread by different means, not always legal. Thus, Girsh Shapiro was suspected of having bought stolen oil and, as of April 1902, had a criminal case pending.²¹ A close review of articles displayed on Leiser Hait's stall on February 12, 1873, revealed a headlight, an axe, two zinc buckets, and a piece of copper—all taken off a locomotive. As it turned out, those items had been purchased wholesale from a former train driver.²² Sometimes the city market yielded even more exotic finds. Stein, the petty trader mentioned above, had a copper tap confiscated, the kind that belonged to barrels with boiled water set up by city authorities during the cholera epidemics. Stein pleaded loss of memory as to who had sold him the tap and when. During the summer months petty traders took their business to the nearby resorts of Hungerburg (Ust-Narva/Narva-Jõesuu) and Schmetzke (Metski); in 1892 and 1893 the community of wandering peddlers also included Zaker Shakerov and Berson. No matter what kind of business Narva Jews were engaged in, the scope of operations remained minuscule. It was no different with pawnbroking, as the following deed attests: "I, August Tats, a soldier of the 100 Ostrovsky infantry regiment on leave, have sold to the Jewish corset-maker Hait my woollen coat for Rbl. 7.50. In the case, upon my return two weeks later, I had not paid him back that money, plus Rbl. 2.50, he, Hait, may sell off my coat."²³

The 1884 list, among others, included the names of three Jewish merchants belonging to the Second Guild. On that occasion the list also stipulated their annual income: Israel Tonne's trade balance was minus Rbl. 2,500; Leiser Hait, who owned three businesses, broke even; and retired soldier Samuel Goffmann claimed a Rbl. 50 profit. Three years later the Second Merchant Guild expanded on the account of Feiga Chertkova, Samuel Rutstein, Haim Terk, and Samuel Isermann.²⁴ In 1889 they were joined by Benjamin Mikhailovsky, Nata Glasmann, and once again

²⁰ EAA, 849/1/878, 40; 849/1/916, 22.

²¹ EAA, 633/1/24, 60–61.

²² EAA, 3070/2/176, 15, 17.

²³ EAA, 633/1/18, 8.

²⁴ EAA, 849/1/464, 7, 17, 56; 849/1/465, 6, 8, 10, 12. Artisans were entitled to guild certificates, which prescribed trading exclusively with own produced articles. See Iu. Gessen and V. Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov o evreiakh s raziasneniiami po opredeleniiam Pravitelstvuiushchego Senata i tsirkuliarami Ministerstva* [Collected laws concerning Jews] (St. Petersburg, 1904), 54–55.

Tonne. The list of Jewish petty traders in Narva from the same year, twenty-one of them, indicates the predominance of exactly that occupation among Jewish businessmen.²⁵ The Jewish business class in Narva grew further by 1892 when Samuel Omer Berias from St. Petersburg was registered, for the first time ever in the history of the city, as a First Guild merchant. The business activities of that particular merchant in Narva proved short-lived. The 1899 statistical table—which was supposed to include all Jewish merchants of the First Guild who had moved to Narva from the Pale of Settlement since the enabling act of 1859—had no entries; Berias's name also did not appear on the general list of the Jewish merchant class.²⁶ The total number of merchants of the First and Second Guild in Narva in 1892 stood at ninety-five. Hence, the ten Jewish merchants (or rather artisans who had acquired guild certificates), constituted a relatively large share.²⁷

In some cases Jewish businessmen's interests in Narva were advanced by their store clerks. For instance, in 1880 Mordechai Girsh Rosenfeld, confidant of the First Guild merchant Mikhail Berishansky from St. Petersburg, obtained three guild certificates and a store clerk license for himself. As of 1883 Rosenfeld was still running a soap factory in the city.²⁸ Mordechai Abram Sholem Trainin, bookbinder by profession, was in 1905 simultaneously overseeing a fuel oil business.²⁹ In legal terms, it appeared as follows: "I authorize you traveling to all the cities within the Russian Empire and abroad with the purpose of purchasing the goods for my business allowed by the law, negotiating the price with sellers, executing payments, and dispatching those goods under my direction. I trust and will not dispute whatever has been legally committed in accordance with this mandate." This was the authorization issued by Jenkel Iov Katzenelbogen, Second Guild merchant from Kovno (Kaunas), to Salomon Feldmann on November 10, 1910.³⁰

²⁵ EAA, 849/2/179, 3, 5, 8–11.

²⁶ EAA, 849/1/878, 10.

²⁷ 849/1/473, 10.

²⁸ EAA, 849/1/599, 15; 849/1/284, 105. By the 1859 act store clerks were allowed to settle outside the Pale of Settlement insofar as they were employed by a First Guild merchant. From 1902 onward Jewish artisans could also obtain a store clerk license. See Gessen and Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov*, 35–36; E. Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatelstvo o evreiakh. Po povodu zakonov s raziasneniiami* [Current legislation concerning Jews] (Kiev, 1911), 403.

²⁹ EAA, 633/1/50, 117, 122.

³⁰ EAA, 633/1/96, 53.

One of the richest merchants in Narva was indisputably Benjamin Mikhailovsky. Having arrived with his family in 1886, Mikhailovsky traded in stationary and rubber products. In 1895 he also obtained permission to deal in watches, and gold and silver jewelry.³¹ In February 1901 Mikhailovsky requested permission from the municipality to build a pier. The businessman sought a ten-year land lease, so he could do a proper job on the project. Mikhailovsky asserted that his request of half a year earlier had been granted. However, the allocated piece of land by the Narva River in Hungerburg proved shallow and would altogether require significant investments to develop. Furthermore, had the pier been located in the designated location, it would have proven uncompetitive against one owned and managed by Narva shipping industrialist Pavel Kochnev. Ultimately, on November 6, 1901, the city government made the decision to rent out a tract of land immediately north of Kochnev's port to Mikhailovsky for one hundred rubles for three years. The designated boat route extended from Sievershausen (Siivertsi/Sivertsy) to Popovka.³² The right to operate the pier was renewed for the 1906 navigation season. After all, Mikhailovsky was never in a position to really compete with Kochnev. The rent paid by the former was fifteen times smaller than that by the latter, matching the size of their respective enterprises.³³

Another business branch to which Mikhailovsky ventured was printing. He owned a printing press and, alongside commercial publications, did odd jobs for the Narva municipality (e.g., printing public announcements by police authorities).³⁴ Ironically, the standard form "Information about Jews" was in part printed by Mikhailovsky. When it came to printing a newsletter of the Narva Jewish meeting house (*Izvestia rukovodstva molelni*), however, a press other than Mikhailovsky's did the job. In 1907 Mikhailovsky had a minor mishap. In the course of a search conducted in the press's store-room the police confiscated 11,119 cards they considered pornographic. In spite of the explanation given by the owner of the printing press, according to which the content was anything but pornographic since the package had been cleared by customs without any problem, the cards were eventually sent to St. Petersburg provincial government by special delivery for a final

³¹ EAA, 633/1/24, 92–93; 849/1/786, 30.

³² EAA, 849/1/897, 3–6.

³³ EAA, 849/1/498, 19; 849/1/1067, 47.

³⁴ Among other things, Mikhailovsky produced postcards and a pamphlet about the city of Narva on the occasion of a regional Estonian song festival held in the city in 1912.

decision.³⁵ Mikhailovsky was altogether one of the few Narva traders who received his merchandise directly from abroad. A well-established businessman, Mikhailovsky gave to charity. In 1902 he donated stationary to the Narva Peter volunteer fire brigade, and from 1907 onward he had served as an auditor for the same setup.³⁶

Alongside Mikhailovsky one can find other affluent Jewish businessmen in Narva during this time, for example, watchmaker Abram Kitain; a burglar who broke in Kitain's shop in 1903 made away with 1,805 rubles worth of goods. Moshe Usharov (Ushar), in addition to a watch shop, ran a headwear store.³⁷ In fact, most of the stores owned by Jews sold garments: Yitzhak Augustin, Peishe Vera Rubanovich, Sender Rubanovich, Abram Rubanovich, Leiser Belostotsky, and Lewer. Salomon Ginsburg dealt in fabrics and so did Samuel Girshovich, who in addition also sold hats and underwear.³⁸ The Jews not only enhanced the local business environment but also served as the population group most prone to innovation. Take, for example, the electricity consumer list from 1909, which featured eight Jewish-owned shops, Shapiro's warehouse, Mikhailovsky's press, and Usharov's private home.³⁹ Jews also contributed to the field of popular entertainment. Thus, the city government granted Nahum Brenner permission to set up a carousel in Ivan borough for three days beginning on May 19, 1874. The same permission he sought in 1879 for Pentecost. Also granted was the request of Moshe Epstein to rent the city theater for two days in June 1875.⁴⁰

Life in a city presupposes multilevel personal interaction. Obviously, it was no different with the Jews. Having said that, relations between Jews and Gentiles—at least on the basis of available sources—remained rather formal. It did happen that a Russian would be asked to sign a contract on behalf of an illiterate Jew, though in most cases such a request was directed to a fellow Jew. Some shops fostered examples of long-term interaction. Based on mutual respect, workplace relations between the shop owner and his or her employees could thrive for decades.⁴¹ Still, there is

³⁵ EAA, 633/1/56, 110.

³⁶ EAA, 849/1/970, 16; 849/1/1107, 98.

³⁷ EAA, 633/1/32, 158; 633/1/24, 92–93. Usharov advertised his clothing store as follows: "Fashion boutique: unlimited supply of velvet caps, leather and fur ladies hats, collars, etc." See *Razdaetsia besplatno*, October 18, 1897.

³⁸ EAA, 633/1/24, 92–105.

³⁹ EAA, 849/2/111, 2–5.

⁴⁰ EAA, 849/2/27, 44; 849/2/27, 102. No information is available as to the particular purpose Epstein had rented the theater.

⁴¹ Cf. EAA, 633/1/96, 77.

reason to believe such relations remained largely pragmatic. As part of his rental agreement, Salomon Rosenberg was supposed to take care of street lighting. When having done so for twelve years, Rosenberg apparently had a good rapport with his associate Mikhailov. In 1887, however, the Russian merchant transferred the contract to his name, offering a higher price to the city, and the relationship collapsed.⁴²

A situation in which certain circumstances threatened to undermine any given enterprise or, alternatively, had a potential to radically improve it, typically prompted a unified cross-ethnic front. For instance, an 1895 appeal urged the opening of a loan office specifically targeting money-lending with excessive interest rates. The appeal featured 46 signatures, 25 of them belonging to Russians, 7 to Estonians, 1 to Germans, and 13 to Jews.⁴³ In 1907 thirty-two local traders petitioned the central authorities to lower business tax until after the general economic situation in Narva would have improved. Among other signatories were Abram Shapiro, P. Lewer, A. Blauschildt, R. Blechman, and A. and M. Rubanovich.⁴⁴ Economic damage to individual enterprise could be perceived differently, as transpires from the following request submitted in the spring of 1892 to the Narva night watchmen committee by Moshe Usharov: "I kindly ask to be relieved from paying a fee to the night watchmen this year on account of the latter's carelessness, allowing for the theft from my window facing main street last September that caused me significant damage."⁴⁵ In the early 1900s Usharov launched a timber business, claiming Narva city government as one of his clients. Business was brisk until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In any event, during the First World War Usharov managed better than his competitor Rabinovich. In 1916 the city firewood supply commission sequestered from the latter a large quantity of timber, yet bought a similar consignment from the former, even if the money was eventually paid out to both.⁴⁶

Businesspeople played an important, yet not decisive, part in the life of the Narva Jewish community. That role, at least qualitatively, was fulfilled by artisans, who came to increasingly represent the face of the community. Out of sixty-nine artisans registered in Narva in 1890 only eight were Jewish. Twelve years later, however, the number of Jewish

⁴² EAA, 849/2/27, 128, 177, 199; 849/2/28, 35, 269, 312.

⁴³ EAA, 849/1/48, 17–18.

⁴⁴ EAA, 849/1/81, 67.

⁴⁵ EAA, 849/1/707.

⁴⁶ EAA, 849/2/15, 90–91.

artisans rose to 65, or 148 if counting family members.⁴⁷ By profession, Narva artisans were divided as follows:

Table 1.5 Jewish Artisans in Narva, 1902

	Foremen	Apprentices	Trainees	Total
Tailors	20	2	-	22
Tinsmiths	9	1	2	12
Hatters	8	1	2	11
Shoemakers	7	-	3	10
Watchmakers	5	2	2	9
Chimney sweepers	5	-	-	5
Bookbinders	3	1	-	4
Shoe-polish makers	2	1	-	3
Goldsmiths	2	-	-	2
Hairdressers	2	-	-	2
Coppersmiths	1	-	-	1
Cabinetmakers	1	-	-	1
Total	65	8	9	82

Source: EAA, 633/1/24.

The discrepancy between the official figure and the grand total in Table 1.5 is due to the fact that apprentices and trainees had obviously not been counted as artisans. The figure 65 is altogether questionable for a number of reasons. First, although a statistical analysis of Jewish residents of Narva had not been conducted for the year 1902, apparently they were entered on the list regardless. Second, sometimes no indication was given as for validity of their passports, which could be issued for either one or five years. This alone makes calculating the grand total problematic, since any Jew who failed to extend his or her passport could have been forced to leave the city at once. Conversely, those individuals who left the city while their passports were still valid also left a gap in the statistics. This particular circumstance often caused confusion within police authorities, as will be discussed later. It does make sense, therefore, to list all professional categories to which Jews ever belonged. As a basis, one may take the “Book about Jews,” run by the city police authorities. This book contained information on all the Jews permanently and temporary residing in Narva. Unfortunately, only two such books are still available, for the year 1898 and 1900 respectively.

According to the data in Table 1.6, a large majority of Jewish artisans worked as tailors, shoemakers, hatters, tinsmiths, and watchmakers.

⁴⁷ EAA, 849/1/705, 5; 633/1/24, 206–207.

Chimney sweeps all bore the name Kulmann and were related to each other (this tradition has persisted in independent Estonia). Moisei Aron Kulmann was perhaps the only Jew in the whole city who ever had any connection to industry, namely he also swept factory chimneys.⁴⁸ Because artisans rarely prospered in their respective trades, workshops were typically built inside rented apartments. Most of the workshops were located in downtown and Ivan borough, along Novaia Linia.

Table 1.6. Jewish Artisans in Narva by Profession (Heads of Families), 1898–1900

	Foremen	Apprentices	Trainees	Total
Tailors	26	4	-	30
Shoemakers	15	-	1	16
Hatters	10	2	2	14
Watchmakers	6	2	2	10
Tinsmiths	7	1	-	8
Chimney sweeps	5	-	-	5
Bookbinders	2	-	-	2
Hairdressers	2	-	-	2
Cabinetmakers	2	-	-	2
Butchers (sausage makers)	2	-	-	2
Shoe-polish makers	1	1	-	2
Goldsmiths	1	-	-	1
Blacksmiths	1	-	-	1
Peddlers	5	-	-	5
Garment sellers	3	-	-	3
Physicians	2	-	-	2
Shop hands	2	-	-	2
Press workers	1	-	-	1
Workers	1	-	-	1
Washerwomen	1	-	-	1
Bread sellers	1	-	-	1
Other	3	1	-	4
Total	99	11	5	115

As far as apprentices and trainees were concerned, in accordance with the passport regulations they could study a trade also outside the Pale of Settlement. To qualify, they needed to be younger than 18, and the training period could not exceed five years. The qualification certificate enabled freshly minted artisans to stay in the place where they had undergone their

⁴⁸ EAA, 633/1/24, 170–71.

training.⁴⁹ Jewish artisans had the right to take on apprentices from the Christian community, yet none of these were found in Narva. It seems that Jewish apprentices and trainees too preferred learning a trade with their fellow Jews. Though there were exceptions: two female apprentices from the 1892 list—Shmerka Anno and Sara Arongaus—signed up for the tailor Fromm and foreman Zukov's workshops respectively. The numbers of trainees in Narva grew constantly, reaching thirty-six in 1911.⁵⁰

Using employment contracts as a source, one can gain a good insight into the relationship between foremen and apprentices. The contract on behalf of the fourteen- to sixteen-year-old boys sent for training was signed by their parents. The parent pledged to leave his son in the care of a foreman and to refrain from interfering with the training within the mutually agreed time period. Violation of either clause would result in a fine. For his part, the foremen pledged to provide the apprentice with food, accommodation, and clothes. He was also obliged to pay the apprentice. Payment varied greatly, from ten rubles upon the completion of a two-year course by the goldsmith Leiba Geht to one hundred rubles at the end of the three-year training period; the watchman Schur offered his apprentice five rubles a month. Although Narva artists were not well-to-do, they apparently managed to eke out a living from their respective trades. As a police officer in 1909 remarked with regard to Yitzhak Rabinovich, the latter "has dealt in soap making but, due to the limited market, is now a pretty rich man living off his own capital."⁵¹

The 1898 list featured two people belonging to the so-called mixed estate. Both physicians, Behr Mendel Notenberg and Lasar Kretzer took advantage of the 1879 law that enabled Jews with higher education to settle outside the Pale. Also belonging in this category were druggists, dentists, medical assistants, and midwives.⁵² Of some interest is the list of medical personnel in Narva from the turn of the century. Out of nine medical assistants in the city, one was Jewish: I. Levin. Bluma Levin and Riva Slitzan counted among the ten midwives. Rachel Voitinsky received her diploma from Kharkov University and Alexander Borukhov his from Kiev University.⁵³ Four out of five dental cabinets in the city, but not a

⁴⁹ Gessen and Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov*, 44; Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatel'stvo*, 328–29.

⁵⁰ EAA, 633/1/96, 43.

⁵¹ EAA, 633/1/50, 73–75; 633/1/65, 23.

⁵² Gessen and Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov*, 243; *Evreiskaia Entsiklopedia*, vol. 7, 595.

⁵³ EAA, 633/1/85, 37.

single spa, belonged to Jews. Hanna Rokhlin served as an assistant to the dentist Borukhov. As of 1915 the city had a single Jewish drugstore assistant. Among non-medical professions, criminal lawyer Leon Beshkin worked in Narva for a few years beginning in 1907.⁵⁴

Along with the Jews in select professions, individuals belonging to the following two categories could infrequently be granted a residence permit: sons of elderly parents (in one case, a seventy-year old father), and widows of retired soldiers and servicemen on indefinite leave.⁵⁵ St. Petersburg treasury (Russian: *kazennaia palata*) paid three rubles a month for Debra Korob's upkeep starting from 1883. On what grounds did Haim Ratchik, who was listed in the "Book about Jews" for the year 1902, reside in Narva remains unclear; as officially stated, he was living from his own money.⁵⁶ This observation prompts the question as to the reasons that might cause individual Jews' expulsion from the city.

The Perpetual Hunt for a Residence Permit

The fact that the city of Narva lay outside the Pale of Settlement imposed major limitations on Jewish mobility. A Jewish artisan who expressed a desire to settle in Narva had to present to the police authorities his passport, his diploma, and proof from the police that he had never been criminally charged.⁵⁷ There were cases when St. Petersburg provincial government officials issued trade documents to a Jewish person without having previously checked if the latter was entitled to receive one. To avoid such incidents in the future, city authorities received a circular, according to which from January 1894 onward such a procedure required the go-ahead from the police. Homeowners were required to inform the police if there were any Jews living on their premises. Non-compliance was punishable by a fine.⁵⁸ That is what happened in 1870 to Emma Kreuzer, who had failed to report on a Jewish man who stayed in a building she owned for ten days in December. Narva police prefect demanded the hefty one hundred-ruble fine for the offender. Bizarrely, as the aggravating circum-

⁵⁴ EAA, 633/1/86, 60, 143; 849/2/113, 214; 633/1/57, 84.

⁵⁵ EAA, 633/1/50, 42; 633/1/96, 49; 633/1/24, 47–48. See also Gessen and Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov*, 34, 55–56.

⁵⁶ EAA, 633/1/24, 48–49.

⁵⁷ EAA, 633/1/96, 44. See also Gessen and Friedstein, *Sbornik zakonov*, 45.

⁵⁸ EAA, 849/1/770, 6; 633/1/96, 1.

stance, he stated that Kreuzer had never violated the registration regulations before. Obviously, it had to do with the fact that the tenant was a Jew, since normally in such cases the fine did not exceed twenty-five rubles.⁵⁹ The task of the police was basically to monitor whether Jews engaged in the craft for which they had received their license. This provision invited different interpretations and hence abuse.

The circumstances of Jankel Moshe Feinberg, a petty bourgeois from Wilkomir (Ukmergė) county in Kovno province, may be regarded a classical case. Having submitted all the required documents, Feinberg received the right to settle in Narva on condition that he would engage in shoemaking. During a routine inspection of summer 1901 the city physician discovered in the Kreuzer-owned building a rawhide from Feinberg's workshop. In accordance with general sanitary regulations issued by the city government, the physician put this violation on file. Meanwhile, in October of the same year a police officer discovered a further twenty-eight rawhides. On that occasion a justice of the peace (*mirovoi sudia*) fined Feinberg. Despite this, in mid-December Feinberg was again caught red-handed. From behind the counter came twenty-six goat rawhides and the backroom concealed twenty-six treated cow hides. A certain peasant attending to his cartload in front of the workshop had confessed to having just delivered the hides from the Yamburg (Kingisepp) market upon Feinberg's request. And so the workshop owner confessed to his crime. The following day the head of the police resolved that, "taking into account that Feinberg, along with the prescribed trade, has been mainly engaged in selling and buying rawhides, oblige him against his signature to leave the city of Narva within two weeks. In the case of non-compliance, he will be forcefully deported to his place of origin." Feinberg pleaded to extend the deportation deadline on the grounds that he had a family and had a household to run. Moreover, even if he did indeed engage in a trade other than the one allowed, he needed the raw material for making shoes. Feinberg's plea left the police chief unmoved. In his January 17, 1902, report to the St. Petersburg provincial police authorities, the head of the local police presented the case in such a way that Feinberg seemed to have been engaged in trade only formally, in order to secure a residence permit in Narva. According to the Narva police official, Feinberg intended to illegally bulk purchase rawhides for the purpose of reselling them in Vilno (Vilnius) and Estonian provinces without the certificate of a veterinarian. Furthermore, according to hearsay, Feinberg had earlier been taken to

⁵⁹ EAA, 633/1/56, 205.

court in Yamburg for the possession of stolen goods.⁶⁰ Against all odds, Feinberg won the case. Following up on the plea submitted by Feinberg, St. Petersburg provincial government stayed the deportation order. Central authorities faulted the investigation file forwarded by the Narva police to have proven that the abovementioned Jew did not engage in his prescribed trade at all.⁶¹ The positive outcome in this particular case was an exception to the rule. Typically in such situations, once signed the deportation order was in effect; defying the order was next to impossible as the signatory was instantly placed under police surveillance.⁶² The police surveillance, it should be mentioned, was quite comprehensive. To give just one example, a police officer reported to his higher-ups that Hana Levitanus, who was slated for deportation from Narva, did leave the city of her own will at two o'clock at night on March 16, 1911.⁶³

Cheating themselves out of the system was one way of avoiding restrictions on mobility, leaving the country for good was another. Emigration from cities in Estonian province with larger Jewish population (e.g., Tartu) was on the rise in the late 1880s and early 1890s.⁶⁴ This pattern did not extend to Narva, however. For the entire period from 1874, only Moshe Flitter left for abroad in 1905, and in 1908 Meir Bober, moved to Paris.⁶⁵ A more common practice was seeking favor from a particular city official, or any individual in a position of authority for that matter. In Narva, that person proved to be Freimann, city borough police officer and collegiate counsellor who was frequently authorized by police authorities to be present at the meetings of the local Jewish community; the Jews themselves praised him.⁶⁶ There is no way of knowing what made Freimann assist individual Jews, or whether money was involved. In 1902 the St. Petersburg provincial government conducted a poll of sorts, which inquired as to whether local police authorities were satisfied with the procedures implemented in the cities outside the Pale for the purpose of monitoring Jews engaged in trade. In the opinion of the Narva police chief, the existing procedures were acceptable, as they caused inconvenience neither to the police nor the Jews.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ EAA, 633/1/18, 91–94, 108–109.

⁶¹ EAA, 633/1/24, 196.

⁶² EAA, 633/1/27, 1–4; 633/1/18, 84.

⁶³ EAA, 633/1/96, 45.

⁶⁴ Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 22.

⁶⁵ EAA, 633/1/96, 227–28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 84–85, 189.

⁶⁷ EAA, 633/1/24, 209.

What else might cause revocation of a residence permit? Those apprentices who learned their trade outside the Pale could stay put on the condition they open their own workshop. Gerson Ginsburg, who had learned the art of watchmaking from Ruvim Jankelevich, could thus legally remain in Narva if he opened a workshop of his own, in accordance with the injunction of the St. Petersburg provincial authorities from 1904. That, however, did not happen, since Ginsburg continued earning a living as apprentice in Jankelevich's watch and jewelry shop. He eventually lost his residence permit.⁶⁸ Failure to produce his passport as requested might as well have resulted in his deportation. The delay was sometimes due to trivial reasons, for instance if the person in question did not mail his passport from the original domicile until after the fee had been paid, or if the passport had been sent abroad in order to settle an inheritance case.⁶⁹

While the Narva police department were trying to assert their influence by stalling the issue of or refusing to extend residence permits, it had an incomplete overview of the Jews who left the city voluntarily. Thus in May 1902, the department requested police officers to check if the Jews registered as residents were still living in the city, and if that was no longer the case, when and where did they depart. Out of the eighteen people on the list, the police knew the whereabouts of just thirteen.⁷⁰ With time it got even worse. In 1911 the head of the city police district received an order to expel from Narva those Jews who had been issued a residence permit yet failed to produce a trade diploma. Only one person out of the twelve entered in the list with such a status was still around. As for the rest, they had "left, no-one knows where." Next was the question about Jewish trainees whose training period had ended. The list contained fifty names: whereas Josel Seletsky and Sheah Lundin had left "some four-six years ago god knows where"; Hannah Livshits "was not found in the first district"; Mack Donda and Judel Rattush had already said farewell to Narva in 1904; Josel Katzev and Samuel Ketler "don't live here, no-one knows them"; Ruvim Jankelevich had departed "long ago," and so on. It also worked other way around. Jacob Stein had been deported instantly from Windawa (Ventspils) to Narva, for which he held a residence permit.⁷¹ To be fair, Narva's police chief did not express any particular bias toward Jews. As a state official, he had eagerly implemented tsarist

⁶⁸ EAA, 633/1/50, 50.

⁶⁹ EAA, 633/1/24, 20, 24, 28–29.

⁷⁰ EAA, 633/1/24, 148–49.

⁷¹ EAA, 633/1/96, 64, 81–82, 219–24, 227–28.

policy, which had governed the lives of Jews across the expanse of the empire.

There were other authorities who showed interest whether this or that particular Jew had obtained his or her residence papers legally. On January 4, 1909, the head of the Narva police received a letter from his counterpart in Yamburg, who was enquiring about certain Mendel Leib Abramson. Together with his family Abramson had been living illegally in the building belonging to Abram Gorfinkel for over half a year. His wife for a good three years was now in possession of a fake passport, which had certainly involved a bribe. Abramson Senior had obtained a cabinetmaker diploma from another Jewish petty criminal. He was working at the time as an accountant in Zarcha's timber business, without being able to name even a single tool of the trade. The Yamburg police official might have had personal scores to settle with Abramson, since the latter—as it turned out—did not actually stay with Gorfinkel but was actually engaged in forestry in Wesenberg (Rakvere) county.⁷²

Sometimes a police investigation was triggered by an anonymous letter, not infrequently written by fellow Jews. With respect to legal case no. 2,869 opened by the Narva police department in the summer of 1902, Leiser Hait was of an opinion that the anonymous letter slandering him had been submitted by S. Inerfeldt. Inerfeldt owed Hait Rbl. 136.50 and, had the latter decided to pursue legal action to retrieve the money, the former promised “trouble.”⁷³ The allegation from 1911, according to which five Jews had been illegally residing and working in Narva, proved groundless.⁷⁴

The extent of official persecution, including limitations on mobility and profession, poses the question as to why Jews even wanted to settle in a city like Narva. Consider, for example, the claim of Avraam Itai and Mordechai Neimtam that Latgale in present-day Latvia (then part of Vitebsk province) “was a backward area removed from major Jewish centers and therefore unattractive to Jews.”⁷⁵ That sounds pretty odd, taking into account that the population of Dünaburg (Dvinsk/Daugavpils) and other cities in Latgale were almost 50 percent Jewish, beyond comparison with anywhere in Estonia. As mentioned earlier, the Jewish population of Narva grew at a constant rate. Retired soldiers, who constituted the first

⁷² EAA, 633/1/65, 14–16.

⁷³ EAA, 633/1/24, 156–57, 160.

⁷⁴ EAA, 633/1/96, 159–60.

⁷⁵ Avraam Itai and Mordechai Neishtat, *Cherez tri podpolia* [Through three undergrounds] (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Alia, 1976), 18.

permanent Jewish residents in the city, apparently did not care much about the proximity to an abstract “center of Jewish life” when they decided to take root in Narva.⁷⁶ It was not really community cohesion that brought Jews to Narva. As a somewhat simplistic proposition, one may say that Jews always went where they were allowed to go. It should be kept in mind, however, that a majority of Jews who entered the city were only able to do so as certified craftsmen and traders. As Salomon Levin stated, “I had come to Narva because I could not find appropriate commercial space to establish a bakery in St. Petersburg.”⁷⁷ This is probably closer to an answer, which may be formulated as follows: Jews traveled to the places that carried the promise of business advancement.

A relatively high urbanization percentage among Jews (see Table 1.1) points to the same conclusion. Counting by estate, Jewish peasants for the first time appeared in Narva only at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that, the ten peasants comprised just 2 percent of the total Jewish population in the city. Hence, among the cow keepers who used the city pasture in 1895 there was just one Jew, Leiser Hait. Abram Gorfinkel reportedly kept a goat, of which one could read in the city government’s report for the same year. The entry “miscellaneous revenues” listed three rubles that Gorfinkel had to pay for the privilege of feeding his animal.⁷⁸ With two goats each, Yitzhak Zukermann and Benjamin Mikhailovsky belonged among the 238 cattle owners listed for the year 1908. The only Jew in the city who owned a horse, as of 1912, was Abram Shapiro.⁷⁹ Bylaws, which imposed restrictions on real estate ownership, had further accelerated the Jews’ alienation from the rural lifestyle.⁸⁰

Political and Social Participation

Moving from the general to specific, there is not much to say about Jewish participation in mainstream politics. In accordance with the 1864 law, only real estate owners had the right to partake in county elections (as a city with over 2,000 inhabitants, the lower income limit in Narva was set

⁷⁶ Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 31.

⁷⁷ EAA, 633/1/24, 234. Eventually, Levin had little luck in Narva, since the house owner, Emma Kreuzer, did not allow using the rental as a bakery.

⁷⁸ EAA, 849/1/786, 49; 849/1754, 19.

⁷⁹ EAA, 633/1/62, 10–13; 849/1/1196, 12.

⁸⁰ EAA, 633/1/96, 62–63.

at Rbl. 1,000). Hence, Israel Tonne was the only Narva Jew—with a real estate worth estimated at 2,000 rubles—who took part in the elections to the Yamburg county government in 1877. In 1886 the right to vote received Nota Glasmann.⁸¹ The 1890 supplement to the earlier law, however, stripped Jews of the right to elect officials at county level.⁸² It proved no different when it came to city-level elections. The City Charter in principle enabled Jews to take part in electing the local administration. In this case the right to vote was conditional upon either the relative worth of real estate or a fee paid off the trade/business certificate.⁸³ Among the 599 registered voters who qualified to take part in the Narva city government elections in 1878 one was Jewish, Abram Usharov. By 1882 the number of Jewish voters increased to three: Abram Kretzer, Israel Tonne, and Moshe Usharov; the 1886 elections featured as many Jewish voters: Tonne, Salomon Goffman, and Haim Terk.⁸⁴ Jewish participation in local elections came to an abrupt end with the 1892 City Charter. As Article 24, Clause 3 of the charter put it: “until any further change in the legislation concerning Jews . . . they are not allowed to partake in the city government elections.”⁸⁵ Consequently, not a single Jew got to vote in the 1894 elections in Narva, even if nine of them could hypothetically exercise this right on the basis of their First and Second Merchant Guild certificates.⁸⁶ The restrictive legislation remained in place until after the February 1917 Revolution in Russia.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the registered Jewish voters were not necessarily eager to take part in the election process, let alone enter the city administration. The only such known case for Narva is from mid-December 1916. Upon recommendation from the city government and St. Petersburg treasury, authorities conducted elections to replace the outgoing officials. The position of a deputy for one of the delegates went to the Second Guild merchant Abram Shapiro, who was elected by seventeen votes to two.⁸⁷

Sometimes it is difficult to avoid the impression that particular events, in Russia and in Europe generally, of immediate concern to Jews had escaped the attention of Narva Jews. When everyone else remained silent, the leftist press on occasion nailed a particular issue involving Jews. Take, for example,

⁸¹ EAA, 849/1/557, 4; 849/1/662, 3.

⁸² Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatelstvo*, 23.

⁸³ Gusev, *Zakony o evreiakh*, 11–13.

⁸⁴ EAA, 849/1/22, 5; 849/1/23, 1–9.

⁸⁵ Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatelstvo*, 23–24.

⁸⁶ EAA, 849/1/473, 24, 26, 31, 51.

⁸⁷ EAA, 849/2/15, 136.

the so-called Beilis Affair.⁸⁸ Editor in chief of the Marxist newspaper *Narva Kiir*, K. Reinberg, was sentenced by the Reval (Tallinn) circuit court to one month in jail on account of his article, "Jews and Capitalism." The article, which appeared on October 12, 1913, argued that the criminal case against Beilis sought to perpetuate the myth of Jewish ritual murder, which in itself was only possible under capitalism.⁸⁹ Marxism, as exposed by Reinberg and his newspaper, generated altogether little excitement among Narva Jews.

A circular letter of the St. Petersburg provincial government from mid-1909 requested Narva police authorities from then onward to also identify Jews based on their political reliability.⁹⁰ In the case of Narva this precaution proved excessive: local Jews stayed away from radical politics. Tailor Salomon Shneiders supplied perhaps the only example to the opposite. The police reported that on August 16, 1906, in the forest somewhere near Popovka village, Shneiders took part in a rally.⁹¹ Tsarist authorities kept a watch of both Jewish political mobilization for the leftist cause and antisemitic violence. Thus, in the spring of 1904 the minister of the interior sent out a secret circular to provincial, city, and local police authorities, alerting them to heightened hostility toward Jews in the areas with a significant Jewish population. The minister urged effective measures in place to avert potential violence.⁹² Fortunately, neither then nor later were any acts of anti-Jewish violence registered in Narva.

The available sources suggest that Narva Jews by and large stayed out of the public eye. Jewish participation in public life was usually limited to donations to voluntary and/or charitable organizations. At the same time, a few local Jews took advantage of the free city library.⁹³ Neither were contacts with Jews residing in Estonian province particularly strong. A certain Narva Jew, D. Garfinovich made a trip to Yuriev (Tartu), where he reportedly donated one rouble to the local synagogue.⁹⁴ It should be added that the very notion of *Estonian Jewry* did

⁸⁸ An ex-soldier and father of five Menahem Mendel Beilis was accused of ritual murder, but was eventually acquitted by the jury in the fall 1913 trial in Kiev.

⁸⁹ Reported in *Rassvet* (St. Petersburg), November 14, 1914.

⁹⁰ EAA, 633/1/65, 44.

⁹¹ EAA, 633/1/69, 77.

⁹² EAA, 633/1/30, 53.

⁹³ EAA, 849/2/65, 39, 56–57; 849/1/970, 16.

⁹⁴ *Otchet khoziastvennogo pravlenia Evreiskogo Molel'nogo Obshchestva v gorode Yurieve* [Report of the board of the Jewish house of prayer in Tartu] (Tartu, 1905), 5. There was no person with such a name registered in Narva; most likely the person in question was Rabbi Gorfinkel.

not exist until after the February 1917 Revolution.⁹⁵ As the administrative division did not align with ethnic borders, regional identity was also absent. At most, one can demarcate ethnic pockets by using a geographical principle, at the county level. Hence, it may be justified to speak of Polotsk or Wilkomir county Jews.

Table 1.7. Jewish Students at Select Narva Schools, 1876–88, 1900.

	1876/77	1877/78	1878/79	1879/80	1880/81	1881/82	1883/84	1884/85	1885/86	1886/87	1888/89	1900/01
City school					-	-	2	1	-		4	
Two-year boys school	1	1	2	2	4	3	1	1	3	5		5
Two-year girls school	3	2	2			2	3	2	1	1	1	5

Source: EAA, 849/2/57; 849/2/59; 849/2/61; 849/2/64; 849/1/282; 849/1/284; 849/1/285; 849/1/286; 849/1/288; 849/1/1157; 849/1/1225.

In a journal article from early 1941, Abe Liebmann insisted on the cultural backwardness of Estonia's Jews. According to Liebmann, it had to do with the latter pedigree going back to Cantonist soldiers.⁹⁶ This, rather general statement, was apparently due to self-censorship practiced under Soviet rule when Liebmann wrote this particular piece. Perhaps more surprising is Liebmann's other assertion from 1937, according to which until 1911 Jewish parents did not send their children to school at all.⁹⁷ Needless to say, the author is potently wrong. As with other aspects of Jewish life, the complete picture of educational practices is hard to get by due to the following factors: (a) deficient source material; (b) missing data for primary school; and (c) students' religion had not always been registered and not for all schools. In the case of Narva, (incomplete) statistical data is available for three specific schools.

Table 1.7 does not suggest a particular pattern when it comes to fluctuation in the number of school students, about two per academic year,

⁹⁵ *Evreiskaia Molodaia Mysl* (Reval), February 28, April 1, and June 28, 1919.

⁹⁶ Liebmann, "Juut-kantonistide problem tsaari-Venemaal ja Eestis," 96.

⁹⁷ Liebmann, "Ajaloolised ja kultuurilised eeldused juudi koguduste tekkimiseks ja akujunemiseks Eestis," 101.

which corresponds to the absolute number of Jews in Narva. Since the last available data is for the year 1900–1901, there is no way of knowing whether the numbers kept growing or remained constant. This table is obviously incomplete. To give just one example, in 1894 the girls' school was so full that it had to limit enrollment. Among prospective students who did not get a spot that year were six Jewish girls.⁹⁸

Jews also studied at high schools, as mediated by police authorities. Thus, in September 1902 the St. Petersburg provincial government notified the director of the Narva boys' high school that Jacob Evensohn, Elia Smuskovich, and Josel Woelkersohn were not allowed into the city even on a temporary basis. In support of their application for admission, the above individuals argued that they did not belong in the category of *Jews*, but the authorities disagreed.⁹⁹ Some Jewish youths had chosen the path less traveled by enrolling themselves into the Special Educational Institution by the Narva Pedagogy and Hygiene Association. Among the eleven students in this particular institution were the third-graders Elia Kirschenbaum, Sofia and Samuel Mikhailovsky. The association itself proved popular among Narva Jews, ten of whom stood on its membership list for the year 1908.¹⁰⁰ Some Jews took drawing classes ran by the boys' high school for the benefit of Narva artisans and cotton mill's workers.¹⁰¹

Continuing with the subject of adult education, tsarist authorities wrestled with the problem of inadequate knowledge of Russian by Jews as late as the mid-nineteenth century, which was attested by a respective clause in the 1835 law. The clause provided that a signature could also be executed in "Jewish" (Yiddish), given that it had been certified and translated into the language in which the document was compiled.¹⁰² Such instances were also registered in Narva, alongside with the more common variation of three crosses. As far as the three-cross signature is concerned, it was particularly common in the records related to the military draft. This applied mainly to the recent arrivals from the Pale, say, those Jews who had come to Narva a year or so earlier.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ EAA, 849/1/43, 49.

⁹⁹ EAA, 633/1/24, 238.

¹⁰⁰ EAA, 849/1/1157, 56.

¹⁰¹ EAA, 849/1/965, 20.

¹⁰² Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatelstvo*, 124.

¹⁰³ This type of archival documents is quite prevalent and may otherwise provide an additional perspective on Jewish history. Due to lack of space it had not been incorporated into this particular chapter.

Hypothetically, it should have been possible to draw a separate literacy/illiteracy statistical chart, since this data was part of the general information sheets about Jews. For some reason, however, writing and reading proficiency was consistently underreported by the police. The only data available is for the year 1907, though exclusively for the Narva/Peter borough. Out of sixty-nine Jews in the borough, fourteen men and thirteen women, that is, two-fifths, were illiterate.¹⁰⁴ This single entry is obviously not enough to draw any far-reaching conclusions. For one, as mentioned earlier, Jews residing in this particular part of the city tended to be less affluent than those in the two other boroughs. In effect, illiteracy rates underscored class divisions. That said, about 95 percent of Estonian peasants were literate by the end of the nineteenth century.

In spite of the official policy curbing the number of Jews permanently settled outside the Pale, authorities regarded the local Jewish community as a constituent part of society. As an illustration, one may evoke the large-scale celebration in 1904 that marked two hundred years of Russian rule in Narva. On that occasion the city government ordered a series of commemorative silver and bronze medals. The silver medals were distributed among high-ranking city bureaucrats while the bronze medals, two hundred in total, were given to lower-level officials: lawyers, military officers, police inspectors, congregations, and so on. Among the recipients was also the Jewish meeting house.¹⁰⁵

Jews as Christians and Jews

As far as official limitations on Jewish mobility are concerned, I have so far mainly discussed the implementation of that policy in Narva. Targeting the Jews as a cohesive group, the tsarist government offered a way out for religious converts, making it into law: “residency limitations imposed on Jews do not extend to the individuals who had embraced [Russian] Orthodox Christianity.”¹⁰⁶ Reversely, apostasy could be perceived as a symbolic defeat for Jewish identity. Impossible to turn it into a percentage or neat diagrams, this discussion will obviously entail a good deal of speculation. Even to establish the precise number of converts is a difficult task. Once forsaken Judaism, any given individual ceased to be Jewish in the eyes of the authorities and so did data collection. The fresh convert lost not just his name

¹⁰⁴ EAA, 633/1/62, 116–25.

¹⁰⁵ EAA, 849/1/978, 10–13.

¹⁰⁶ Vainstein, *Deitsvuiushchee zakonodatelstvo*, 127.

but also contact with his or her former coreligionists. The best way of identifying the born-again Christians would be to use registry books of specific Orthodox congregations; those, however, are locked up in the Vital Statistics Archives. City government requests for information on Jewish converts constitute another source, numerous lacunae notwithstanding. Finally, the military draft generated a bulk of records that may help to better understand the phenomenon of religious conversion.

A certain Jewish “schismatic” converted to Orthodox Christianity in 1884 at Our Lady church in Ivangorod.¹⁰⁷ In this particular case the reasons for conversion remain unknown. Samuel Benjamin Rabinovich, however, promptly explained in February 1889 his decision to change religion. Rabinovich was about to get conscripted in Oshmiany (Ashmiany) county in Vilno province. By having renounced Judaism, he was able to register as petty bourgeois in Narva instead.¹⁰⁸ In February 1893, a certain Alexander Alexandrov requested if, as Narva petty bourgeois, he might be allowed to do his military service in Novo-Minsk county. City authorities were confused, since no such person had been registered among the Narva petty bourgeois. It turned out that, as of three months earlier, the petitioner was known as Salomon Ruvim Itzoch and that his rather “complex” name was courtesy of his godfather, who also went by the name Alexander. Vladimir was the new name of the seventeen-year-old Wolf Netenberg, who became a subject of the Russian Orthodox Church in St. Petersburg in 1901. Mikhail Yurkovsky and Maria Katz were both twenty-three when they embraced Christianity in 1902 and 1910 respectively. The fifteen-year-old Haim Sapir converted in 1910, changing his first name to the predictable Mikhail and last name to Alexandrov, after his godfather. The ceremony took place in Tartu, in the Holy George church; as godparents the new parish member had veterinarian Alexander Jurgens and honorary citizen’s widow Alexandra Jurgens. Upon becoming a Christian in 1911 or 1912 in Vyshny Volochok, Josef Zelger received the name Konstantin Bitelev.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ EAA, 849/1/286, 39. This does not necessarily mean that the convert indeed belonged to a Jewish sect. *Schismatic*, as a notion, was rather vague. There were cases when some people in Narva, out of ignorance, considered Judaism schism par excellence. By the same token, the definition of *sectarianism*—as it appeared on page one of the manual *Raspredelenie staoobriadstsev i sektantov po tolkam i sektam* (St. Petersburg, 1901)—ruled out the probability of various interpretations of Judaism.

¹⁰⁸ EAA, 849/1/699, 63.

¹⁰⁹ EAA, 849/2/119, 45; 849/2/120, 9; 849/2/128, 142, 290; 849/2/144, 151; 849/1/1203, 61–62; 849/2/121, 408.

The following example may help account for exceptions. Among other names on the military conscript list—the section covering the petty bourgeois belonging to the Finnish-Swedish Association—was that of Meierovich (Merovitz): widow Anna and her children Alexander, Alfred, Evgeni, Adolf, Emma, and Elise Dorothea. Next to the name of Alfred, who was born in 1883 presumably as a Swede, was marked “Jewish.” The question here is whether Alfred had converted to Judaism or, most likely—judging by the last name—the entire family, except one son, had joined the Lutheran Church.¹¹⁰ This, it should be added, is a rare such example.

All in all there are nine cases of conversion from Judaism to Christianity registered in Narva for the period 1884–1911. The act of conversion, as implied in the previous paragraphs, was meant to achieve a specific goal, which usually had nothing to do with religious beliefs. Not coincidentally, this ritual often preceded military draft, which in turn dictated the choice of domicile. Families with many children, sometimes up to seven, were particularly prone to religious conversion; a single family might have several children who had gone over to Christianity. It never happened that, say, the family head became Christian but his children remained Jewish. The converted Christian as a rule got married to a fellow Christian (read: Russian), and their children were naturally registered as Christian.

Even if incomplete, the conversion statistics nevertheless enable some generalizations. The numbers of converts, at least in the 1900s, were going up rather than down. This fact could be attributed to a certain fatigue from the relentless policy of conventional oppression carried out by the tsarist government. Political upheavals did not come to dramatically affect the lives of Narva Jews, but neither did the religious revival that came to blossom in the areas of traditional Jewish settlement within the Pale.

Judaism, as the spiritual kernel of Jewish life, was never overbearing in Narva. This was in part due to the geographical spread of Jews who had arrived in Narva from a great many places within the Pale of Settlement. Scholars routinely mention Lithuania, Courland, and Poland as the three areas where Estonian Jews originally came from.¹¹¹ In the case of Narva Jews, I am able to precisely identify their places of origin. The following discourse does not apply to the whole of Estonia in its current borders, but certainly to provincial cities such as Wesenberg (Rakvere), Fellin (Viljandi), Pernov (Pärnu), and Weissenstein (Paide). The majority of Jews traveled to Narva directly from the Pale. Proportionately, most of them

¹¹⁰ EAA, 849/1/1200, 223.

¹¹¹ Berg, “The Peculiarities,” 465.

came from Kovno province, both countryside and medium-size cities such as Shavli (Šiauliai), Novoaleksandrovsk (Zarasai), Telshi (Telšiai), and Wikomir. The second largest, by place of origin, was Vitebsk province with the cities of Dvinsk and Rezhitsy (Rēzekne), followed by Vilno province. As in the case with Kovno province, the arrivals from Vilno province stemmed from smaller localities such as Druja and Shervinty (Širvintos), as well as larger cities such as Vilno and Druskinėki (Druskininkai). The fourth largest was Courland province, which lay outside the Pale. The arriving Jews hailed almost exclusively from Courland's cities: Mitava (Jelgava), Bausk (Bauska), Tukum (Tukums), Goldingen (Kuldīga), and Jakobstadt (Jēkabpils).

There is perhaps nothing unusual that a large percentage of Jews came from St. Petersburg province. Quite a few of them had first arrived as soldiers. The city geography extended from the capital St. Petersburg to Petergof, Shlisselburg, Kronstadt, Yamburg, all the way to Ust-Ladoga (Novaia Ladoga). Moving south, Minsk and Mogilev (Magileu) provinces were the birth place for quite a few Narva Jews, both in the countryside and cities such as Minsk, Bobruisk (Babruisk), Shklov (Shklou), and Bykhov (Bykhav). A couple of Jews came also from Chernigov (Chernihiv) province in Ukraine. Compared with other provinces outside the Pale, relatively large amounts of Jews arrived from Novgorod province, mainly the cities of Novgorod and Staraia Russa. In contrast, just a handful of Jews had come from the neighboring province of Pskov (the cities of Pskov, Gdov, and Kholm). Only one person listed Riga in the Livonian province as his former address. The remainder of Narva Jews came from all over: Vyshny Volochek in Tver province and Odessa on the Black Sea coast, Petrozavodsk in Karelia and Arkhangelsk on the White Sea. As for Poland, between 1873 and 1917 just two Jews traveled to Narva from Warsaw, and even then only for a short time. From the Estonian province during this entire period arrived three individuals, from Wesenberg, Reval, and the latter's vicinity. To conclude, the Pale of Settlement and northwestern Russia were the two major regions that the majority of Narva Jews could call home.

Until now, Jokton is the only author who had something to say about the Jewish house of worship in Narva. As he wrote in 1926, "The permission to build a synagogue in Narva was granted in 1877. . . . Erected in 1884, it was closed down in 1890 for five years, until the senate in 1895 promised to reopen it."¹¹² The information provided by Jokton

¹¹² Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 31–32.

should be treated with caution. To begin with, the synagogue did not officially exist in Narva until 1922.¹¹³ What we are talking about here is a house of worship, or a meeting house. As for the year it was established, already in 1875 in the section “miscellaneous buildings,” city authorities listed “one wooden synagogue.”¹¹⁴ The word *synagogue* was used incorrectly, because from the following year onward the same building had been referred to as *house of prayer*.

The distinction between synagogue and house of worship is more significant than it may first appear. The right to build a house of prayer—or school of prayer, in bureaucratic jargon—might be granted wherever the number of Jewish-owned houses did not exceed thirty. Local Jews, as mentioned earlier, were not at all affluent and in most cases rented properties. Furthermore, as of 1875 there was only a handful of Jews in Narva. The law provided for a synagogue in the localities where Jews owned between thirty and eighty houses. In 1868 the Cabinet of Ministers enabled the construction of Jewish houses of worship also outside the Pale, however with the caveat that it was called neither school of prayer nor synagogue.¹¹⁵

The original meeting house was obviously a temporary solution. Already on November 30, 1875, the Narva Jewish Society sent mayor Adolf Hahn a petition, in which it complained that the existing building on St. Petersburg Street in Ivan borough was fairly small and situated far from downtown. The society therefore requested to allocate it gratis 425 square m. of land in downtown Narva.¹¹⁶ On February 27, 1876, the request was granted. The allocated parcel of land was still in Ivan borough, right behind Kriedner barracks.¹¹⁷ Next to the house of worship in 1883 the Jewish community was able to build a ritual bath (*mikveh*). By eighteen votes to eight, Jews received gratis an extra seven square m. of land for that purpose.¹¹⁸

Synagogues belonged to the category of church buildings and as such were exempt by law from taxation. The Narva synagogue, however, had to nevertheless pay property tax. This exception was likely due to the fact that the synagogue had permanent tenants living on its premises and hence was regarded as a private house. In 1897 the house of worship got running water. The city government initially objected to the proposal to extend the

¹¹³ *Põhja Kodu*, August 23, 1922.

¹¹⁴ EAA, 849/2/57, 77.

¹¹⁵ Gusev, *Zakony o evreiakh*, 121–22.

¹¹⁶ EAA, 849/2/144, 48.

¹¹⁷ EAA, 849/2/7, 126–27.

¹¹⁸ EAA, 849/2/9, 59.

pipeline on the grounds that potable water was available from a free municipal tap 150 meters away on Gospitalnaia Street while the Narva River was only 85 meters away. Yet the proposal proved hard to resist: the Jews undertook to build the pipeline at their own cost and service it for a year. Most significantly, they would pay tax off each of an estimated forty thousand buckets of water per year required by the house of worship and the ritual bath.¹¹⁹ The synagogue building itself did not project wealth. That is what a burglar, who had broken into the synagogue on a quiet July night, discovered to his displeasure. All the intruder could get was a copper menorah, two prayer shawls (tallit), two keys from the Torah ark, a copper snuff-box, and “just in case” two hundred stamps that were used to mark the size of individual donations.¹²⁰

However little the synagogue had in terms of interior decoration, the outer walls were barely standing. The entire building was prone to collapse. Source water undermined the foundation, causing the walls to tilt by as much as thirty-five centimeters. The situation apparently became life-threatening, as reported by a neighbor. The neighbor informed the city building commission that the “Jewish synagogue’s collapse would endanger both my property and everyone who live in the house.”¹²¹ This episode is from October 1909. The existing situation had, however, been under discussion at least since 1897. That is when the building commission for the first time considered the issue, obviously inconclusively.¹²²

At the end of 1908 the city government received yet another request from the Jewish community. Signed by Moshe Usharov, Abram Shapiro, Abram Rubanovich, Sender Rubanovich, Abram Gorfinkel, and V. Rutstein, the petition argued that the Jewish house of worship could accommodate only one-half of the congregation. Hence they inquired about the possibility of getting a piece of land in Peter borough, for free or at a discount, to build a new meeting house. Notably, the signatories referred to the existing house of prayer as having been constructed over forty years earlier.¹²³ If correct, the building was then erected before 1872. The city government commented that, since the Lutheran St. Peter parish and the Catholic parish had been earlier allocated land for the construction of their respective church buildings for free, the Jews should be able to get the

¹¹⁹ EAA, 849/1/60, 5, 24.

¹²⁰ EAA, 849/1/57.

¹²¹ EAA, 849/2/23, 90.

¹²² EAA, 849/1/1276, 106.

¹²³ EAA, 849/1/83, 6.

same deal. Except that the city would like to hold on to the requested parcel of land in a prime location. As an alternative, the authorities offered the Jewish community a much larger piece of land of 450 square meters in Narva borough, on Razdelnaia Street yet to be built. "Had the local Jewry intended to build a truly elegant and grandiose house of prayer, which may enhance the city's beauty" city fathers contemplated, "then it might be possible to allocate them a parcel of land on the corner of Sergeievskaja and Boinaia Street, across from the Lavretsov maternity ward."¹²⁴ Eventually, however, the city government decided on March 5, 1909, to sell the Jews the tract of land on Razdelnaia Street for Rbl. 1.25 per square meter.¹²⁵ This decision in its turn did not satisfy the petitioners, who renewed their request in April of the same year. As before, they argued that the existing building would not hold for much longer and that it was located quite a distance. They now, therefore, sought to build a new house of worship on Sennaia Square in downtown Narva.¹²⁶

The issue of a new meeting house remained dormant for the next two years, until December 1911. It turned out that by then Narva had not one but three Jewish houses of worship. One of them was the original building on St. Petersburg Street, plus two private houses of prayer, in Kreuzer house at 80 Chornaia Street and on Pavlovskaja Street respectively. According to a policeman, neither of the private meeting houses had a religious teacher.¹²⁷ The former featured as a branch of the main house of prayer, established in May 1908. As for the house of prayer on St. Petersburg Street, official documents confirm that it was indeed reopened by the senate decision from February 11, 1895.¹²⁸ It may be opportune to mention that the Jews residing in the Joachimstahl (Joaorg) part of the city, which administratively belonged to Estonian province, did not have a house of prayer of their own and therefore were regarded a constituent of the Narva Jewish congregation.¹²⁹ The congregation operated a cemetery, located right outside the city borders. The oldest tombstone in the graveyard was reportedly from 1850.¹³⁰ The nearest Jewish cemetery to that in

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ EAA, 849/1/1114, 136–37.

¹²⁶ EAA, 633/1/65, 31. Narva Jews showed a tendency to move closer to downtown.

¹²⁷ EAA, 633/1/96, 176–77.

¹²⁸ EAA, 633/1/65, 8.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁰ Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 32; According to Liebmann, a tombstone from 1850 in the Narva Jewish cemetery is the oldest anywhere in Estonia (Liebmann, "Ajaloolised ja kultuurilised eeldused," 96).

Narva was in Wesenberg, 90 kilometers away. Hence, the Narva cemetery serviced the Jews from as far as Hungerburg and Jewe (Jõhvi).¹³¹

According to Jokton, a traditional Jewish elementary school (cheder) was established in Narva in 1911 and accomplished precious little. By the seventh month of the school's existence, its teacher had been deported from the city, effectively putting it out of business.¹³² This piece of information is corroborated by official documents, which state that, as of September 1911 the city of Narva had no cheders, Talmud Torah schools, or yeshivas.¹³³ It seems, however, that the cheder had already existed in Narva, if only for a short while. As reported by authorities, the "literacy school" by the house of worship in 1906 had twenty-nine boys and thirteen girls taught by a single teacher. The respective numbers for 1907 increased to thirty and fifteen. Yet later that year Usharov noted that the Jewish school in Narva was no more.¹³⁴

Conclusion

The Jewish population of Narva grew constantly up until 1917, in spite of the fact that both St. Petersburg province and Estonian province lay outside the Pale. The local Jewish community was mainly comprised of former soldiers and their families and artisans, and to a lesser extent of merchants and intelligentsia. Reporting to the St. Petersburg provincial government, Narva police authorities saw to it that only Jews with proper residence permits could stay in the city. The complex legislation concerning the Jews had loopholes, which could be interpreted either for the benefit or to the detriment of individual arrivals.

The Narva Jewish community was hardly homogeneous, which was largely to do with the great many places its members originally came from. The spiritual life centered around religion, even if Judaism did not have as significant a presence in Narva as it did in parts of the Tsarist Empire with a significant Jewish population. The community operated a cemetery and a house of worship, with the addition of two private meeting houses coming into existence in the early 1900s. Achievements in the field of education as well as in Jewish social life were rather modest. The

¹³¹ EAA, 633/1/86, 65; 633/1/96, 83; 849/1/1114, 49–53.

¹³² Jokton, *Juutide ajalooost Eestis*, 34.

¹³³ EAA, 633/1/96, 60.

¹³⁴ EAA, 849/1/303; 849/1/304, 9, 78.

interaction between Jews and Gentiles in Narva, except for professional links, could not be described as extensive either. The political radicalization that swept the Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century barely affected Narva Jews. To sum up, Narva Jews led what can be described as a quiet existence.

CHAPTER 2

Thanks to the Germans! Jewish Cultural Autonomy in Interwar Estonia

This chapter explores the context of the Estonian law on cultural autonomy from February 1925. I argue that the Jewish minority was an unintended beneficiary of the concession granted by the Estonian government to the Baltic Germans whose land ownership had previously been revoked. Unlike the ethnic Germans, who considered cultural autonomy a tactical retreat, the Jews took full advantage of the opportunity to strengthen communal bonds. Cultural autonomy was upheld throughout the 1930s mainly due to the strenuous desire of the authoritarian regime that seized power in Estonia in 1934 to avoid a conflict with Nazi Germany. As for the Jews, the lack of irredentist tendencies ensured that they could preserve their status.

In comparison with other East Central European countries, the treatment of minorities in interwar Estonia may be considered almost exemplary. Although Estonia was not the first state in Europe to grant its Jewish minority cultural autonomy, that autonomy was never revoked or curtailed, unlike in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania. Until now, scholars have explained this precedent as simply the goodwill of the Estonian authorities. However, I argue that the Jews were unintended beneficiaries of the complex relations of the two largest minority groups, Russian and German, with the nascent Estonian state. Jewish cultural autonomy in Estonia (1925–40) arose as an unintended outcome of the compromise struck between the government and the ethnic German minority. The Jews took full advantage of an act of legislation meant to appease the former landowning class backed up by the German state.

To demonstrate the political reasons behind Estonia's law on cultural autonomy and why it was upheld throughout the period of independence, I

look to the interplay between domestic and international politics. First, I consider Estonia's negotiations with the League of Nations regarding the so-called Minority Clause. Second, I discuss the struggle in the Estonian Parliament over the issue of cultural autonomy. When talking about the peculiarities of Jewish cultural autonomy, I briefly touch upon the situation of the Swedish and Russian minorities in Estonia. Finally, I speculate as to why the growth of nationalism in Estonia in the 1930s only indirectly affected the country's ethnic minorities. In the course of my analysis I draw some comparisons with the two other Baltic countries.

The Estonian Jewish Community: Historical Overview

The Jews' history in Estonia began late and ended abruptly. The first Jewish congregations in Estonia came into existence in the mid-nineteenth century, that is, much later than in Latvia and Lithuania. By 1867 there were only 657 Jews in Estonia. During the following thirty years, however, the Estonian Jewish population experienced unprecedented growth, reaching its highest point with about 5,500 on the eve of the First World War. Jews constituted over 2 percent of the total population of Tallinn and 3.4 percent in Viljandi. At this time, three-fifths of Estonian Jews lived in Tartu (2,027) and Tallinn (1,100). Less than 10 percent chose to settle in the countryside.¹ The German occupation of Estonia, which lasted from February 1918 to November 1919, did not disrupt Jewish life in Estonia to any significant degree, in contrast to the subsequent Bolshevik takeover. The hardship of war and the administrative acts of the new regime combined to bring Jewish social life to a complete standstill in cities like Narva. Of the prewar Jewish population of 523, only one-third stayed in Narva.² Between 1922 and 1934 the Jewish population in Estonia decreased by another 3 percent. By then, Jews constituted 0.4 percent of the total population of Estonia (4,434). Tallinn by far surpassed Tartu in importance, so that by the mid-1930s half of the Jews lived in the Estonian capital, compared with only 920 in Tartu. Only seventy-nine Jews (1.7 percent) lived in the countryside; thus Estonian Jewry was the most urbanized in East Central Europe.

¹ Jokton, *Juutide ajaloo eestis*, 12, 22; Elhonen Saks, *Kes on Juudid ja mis on holo-kaust?* [Who are Jews and what is Holocaust] (Tallinn: Sild, 2003), 133; Berg, "The Peculiarities," 465–66.

² *Evreiskaia Molodaia Mysl* (Reval), April 1 and June 28, 1919.

The Versailles Settlement placed Jews in most East European countries at a disadvantage. The Jewish minority found itself squeezed between two mutually opposing groups such as Ukrainians and Poles in Galicia, or Germans and Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia. The situation of the Jews in Lithuania differed significantly from that in Latvia and Estonia. Lithuanians needed the support of the Jews against the Poles in Vilna. In the former Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire, where the number of ethnic constituents exceeded two, interethnic alliances were not so clearly defined. The statistically predominant nationality in these two countries sought to define themselves against their former oppressors, that is, Germans and Russians. Much emphasis was placed on preventing ethnic Estonians from joining mainstream Russian or German culture. Acculturated Estonians became an object of scorn for their alleged betrayal of the Estonian nation in the making.³ It was not important, therefore, whether Jews allied themselves with Germans or Russians, insofar as they remained out of the way of the country's titular population.

Jews in Independent Estonia

Compared with Latvian Jews, the Estonian Jewish community was somewhat materially poor. According to a report of the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) from the mid-1920s, most of the sixty-five Jewish families in Narva—the country's fifth-largest Jewish community—lived in dire poverty.⁴ Between October 1914 and December 1940, the AJDC aided Estonian Jews to the amount of 4,000 US dollars. That was nothing in comparison with 533,000 dollars spent in Latvia and 1,625,000 dollars in Lithuania. Even Finland, whose Jewish community was comparable in size to Estonia's, received four times more in financial aid.⁵ Nevertheless, even that meager contribution helped alleviate the poverty of the Estonian Jews.

³ Kari Alenius, "Under the Conflicting Pressures of the Ideals of the Era and the Burden of History: Ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918–1925," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004): 38. See also Alenius, *Ajan Ihanteiden ja historian rasitteiden ristipaneissa: Viiron etniset suhteet vuosina 1918–1925* [Under the conflicting pressures of the ideals of the era and the burden of history: Ethnic relations in Estonia in 1918–1925] (Rovaniemi: Societas Historica Finlandiae Septentrionalis, 2003).

⁴ AJDC, "Esthonia: Narva," no date [1926], Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institute of Jewish History (hereafter: YIVO), RG-335.2/1/8.

⁵ "Aiding Jews Overseas," report of the AJDC for 1940 and the first five months of 1941, YIVO, RG-335.1/1. Of all the European Jewish communities, only the one in Greece received less money.

The economic potential of Estonian Jews was incomparable to the situation of the Baltic Germans. Estonian Jews controlled 2.3 percent of trade and 0.6 percent of industry, although they did account for 2 percent of the country's weakly developed heavy industry. Almost all Jewish-owned large companies were located in Tallinn. According to a survey conducted by the Jewish Cultural Council in 1935, the occupational breakdown of Estonian Jews was as follows: trade—30 percent; small business—24; artisans—15; workers—14; professionals—10; big business—5; landlords—1; religious functionaries—1. Between 1925 and 1933 the number of businesses owned by Jews declined by 25 percent. Of thirty-eight Estonian Jews engaged in agriculture only four owned farms.⁶

Estonian Jews were underrepresented among the country's intelligentsia. In contrast to Jewish communities in Lithuania and Latvia, Estonian Jewry did not give the world any renowned scholars, artists, or writers (perhaps with the exception of Louis I. Kahn). By the mid-1930s, only half of Estonian Jewish children went to Jewish schools. Eighteen percent were enrolled in German schools, 17 in Estonian, and another 10 in Russian, whereas in the previous decade 45 percent of Jewish children attended Russian schools.⁷ Parents usually explained their choice in terms of an insufficient command of the Estonian language. The number of Jewish children in Estonian middle and high schools increased after 1934. From then on parents were required to send their children to state schools in the event that schools with instruction in the children's native language (in this case, Yiddish) were unavailable. German-language education was also popular among Latvian Jews. In 1923, for example, 15 percent of students in Latvian German schools were Jewish. In contrast to Estonian Jews, Latvian Jews often used German as a language of communication.⁸

Small numbers and a high level of urbanization and assimilation helped make the Estonian Jewish minority multilingual. Close to 70 percent of Estonian Jews knew German well; for many Jews in interwar Estonia, German was the first foreign language they learned. Prior to 1930, the lan-

⁶ American Jewish Committee, *The Jewish Communities of Nazi-Occupied Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1982 [1944]), 4–5.

⁷ Helker Pflug, "Aspekte jüdischen Lebens in Estland bis 1940" in *Die vergessenen Juden in den baltischen Staaten*, ed. Ansgar Koschel und Helker Pflug (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1998), 55–56. At the same time, Jews spent more money per capita on education than any other ethnic group in the country.

⁸ Jürgen von Hehn, *Die Umsiedlung der baltischen Deutschen—das letzte Kapitel baltischdeutscher Geschichte* (Marburg: J.G. Herder-Institut, 1984), 11, 165.

guages of instruction at the Tallinn Jewish high school were Russian and Hebrew, thereafter Hebrew and Yiddish. Due to the absence of an Orthodox tradition among Estonian Jews, Hebrew speakers had a rather limited audience. That did not prevent, however, acute enmity between the Hebraicists and Yiddishists in Estonia.⁹ In the long run, the Jewish linguistic tradition in Estonia turned out to be rather undeveloped. When the Soviet regime abolished cultural autonomy in 1940 and restricted the use of Yiddish and Hebrew in the public sphere, the Estonian Jews accepted it much more easily than their coreligionists in Latvia and Lithuania.¹⁰

The numbers of Jewish students at the University of Tartu dropped from 188 in 1926 (4 percent of the total student body) to 69 in 1938 (2.1 percent). Some Jews claimed discrimination in the form of more vigorous entrance examinations.¹¹ In 1934 the Jewish Academic Historical and Literary Society at the University of Tartu received permission to establish a chair in Jewish studies. Between 1934 and 1941 a total of twenty-one students enrolled in Jewish studies at Tartu (four from Estonia, thirteen from Latvia, two from Lithuania, and two from Germany). Owing to the prohibition of admission of Jews to German universities, five rabbis came to Tartu to study for their master's degree (though only one of them, Moses Ziegler, obtained a degree in 1937).¹²

Zionism enjoyed universal support among Estonian Jews. Within the Zionist movement, Estonian Jews gravitated toward Zionist Socialism and General Zionism. The main difference between Estonia and the two other Baltic countries was the conspicuous absence of the Jewish Orthodox politics represented by Agudes Yisroel. Otherwise, the Jewish political spectrum in Estonia was a cross between that found in Latvia and Lithuania. Zionism was probably as strong in Estonia as it was in Lithuania. At the same time, a solid support base for Folkspartey in Latvia was comparable to that in Estonia.¹³ As regards general participation in Estonia's political life, Jews took a rather passive stance. In parliamentary elections, Estonian Jews consistently voted for the Socialists.

Generally, Jews gravitated toward Russian and German groupings rather than Estonian. According to one interpretation, this had less to do

⁹ Anna Verschik, "Estonian Yiddish and Its Contacts with Co-territorial Languages" (PhD Thesis, University of Tartu, 2000).

¹⁰ Dov Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940–1946* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1994), 4.

¹¹ American Jewish Committee, *The Jewish Communities*, 3.

¹² Lindroos, "Judaistika õppetool Tartu Ülikoolis 1930. aastatel," 2143–48.

¹³ Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, 227–33, 247–50.

with solidarity among the minorities, but rather with a leaning toward traditional elites in the Baltic. The major drawback in Estonian-Jewish relations was the fact that Jews were not accepted for state service in independent Estonia.¹⁴ In that respect, the Estonian authorities closely followed the tacit policies introduced in Latvia and Lithuania. That Jews were prohibited from entering government service cannot directly be proven through existing documents, neither was discrimination in employment reflected in official statistics. On the contrary, according to the 1934 census, 13.2 percent of Estonian Jews were public servants (*ühiskondlik tegevus*). This category of public service was inclusive and covered education, welfare, military, religion, municipal and government officials, as well as professions (physicians, lawyers, land surveyors, etc.). Thus, according to government statistics, the percentage of officials (*ametnikud*) among the Estonian and Jewish population was 7.1 and 18.7, respectively.¹⁵ Needless to say, these data do not accurately reflect reality. Mixed marriages among Jews and Gentiles were rare in Estonia. Intermarriage data from the early 1930s show that after ethnic Estonians, Jews were the most endogamous group.¹⁶

Relations between the Estonian majority and the Jewish minority can be described as friendly, yet largely superficial. When writing, rather infrequently, about the Jews, newspapers tended to treat them as a somewhat exotic body, with no deep attachment to Estonian soil. "What do we know about the life of Narva Jews?" was the title of an article that appeared in a local Estonian newspaper in 1930. The opening sentence read, "We know Jews as smart businessmen, and that is probably it." Narva Jews were presented as outright Zionists who continually collected funds for the benefit of the Jewish settlements in Palestine. Some families had already moved to Palestine; others purchased pieces of land there, ready to go to in the event the situation in Estonia took a turn for the worse. The article concluded that Narva Jews, like those elsewhere, were determined to maintain their religious and ethnic identity.¹⁷

¹⁴ Olgred Aule, "Juden und Esten," *Mitteilungen aus baltischem Leben* 4 (December 1987): 7.

¹⁵ Tõnu Parming, "The Jewish Community and Inter-ethnic Relations in Estonia, 1918–1940," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 10, no. 3 (1979): 252–53; Rein Ruutsoo, "Rahvusvähemused Eesti Vabariigis" [Ethnic minorities in Estonian Republic], in *Vähemusrahvuste kultuurielu Eesti Vabariigis, 1918–1940*, ed. Anna Matsulevich (Tallinn: Olion, 1993), 17–18.

¹⁶ Parming, "The Jewish Community," 253, 255.

¹⁷ *Põhja Kodu* (Narva), May 13, 1930.

In relation to Jewish emigration from Estonia, the pattern contrasts with that found in most other East Central European countries; the pull factor was much more significant than the push factor. In relative terms however, Jews, alongside Swedes and Baltic Germans, left Estonia at a higher rate than Russians or Estonians. In 1927, for example, Jews accounted for 2 percent (26 people) of all emigrants.¹⁸ Estonian Jews were among the founders of two kibbutzim in Palestine—Kfar Blum and Ein Gev.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, emigration rates may have been higher if it were not for the restrictions that potential recipient countries imposed on immigration. The British authorities restricted Jewish emigration to Palestine in the wake of the Arab riots of 1936–39. In the United States, the 1924 Act fixed the annual entry quota for Estonia at 116. Some Jews believed that Estonia could accommodate a substantial number of Jewish emigrants from other European countries. This was an idea entertained by several delegates at the 1919 Jewish Congress in Tallinn.²⁰ The AJDC recognized early on the importance of Estonia as a destination for Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. Between 1933 and July 1938 the AJDC assisted refugees who arrived in Estonia to the tune of two thousand dollars. The respective sums for Latvia and Lithuania were one hundred and four hundred dollars.²¹

In comparison with other European countries, Estonia adopted a rather mild immigration policy in the late 1930s. Although Jewish immigration to Estonia was discouraged, all those who made it to the country were allowed to stay. There is no evidence that Jewish immigrants were ever harassed in Estonia, as happened, for instance, in France or Switzerland. Both publicly and privately, however, Estonian officials often expressed their determination to prevent a massive influx of Jewish immigrants. In an interview in July 1938 the minister of welfare denied the existence of the so-called Jewish Question in Estonia, referring to the equality of Estonian citizens before the law. Then, however, he went on to say that no more Jews would be allowed into the country.²² The official position regarding Jewish immigration to Estonia, which was not unusual for 1930s

¹⁸ "Die Auswanderung aus Estland im Jahre 1927," *Nation und Staat* 1 (1927/28): 900–901.

¹⁹ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 219.

²⁰ Jokton, *Juutide ajaloost Eestis*, 44.

²¹ "Aid to Jews Overseas," report on the activities of the AJDC for the year 1937, YIVO, RG-335.1/4.

²² "Estland: Einreise der Juden verboten," *Mitteilungen über die Judenfrage* 26–27, vol. 2 (1938): 10.

Europe, displayed no particular hostility toward the Jews. Indeed, the level of antisemitism in interwar Estonia was lower than in most countries of East Central Europe. Examples of anti-Jewish prejudice in Estonia pale in comparison with the extent of popular and political antisemitism in the two other Baltic states, particularly Lithuania.

Religious antisemitism had traditionally been strong in Catholic countries such as Lithuania. In Estonia, the principal denomination was Lutheranism, the religion associated with the German conquest, and therefore not necessarily viewed as the national church. By the same token, the radical right in Estonia (the War Veterans' League, popularly known as Vabs)—in contrast to similar organizations throughout Europe—refrained from directly attacking minorities. The “Jewish Question” made inroads into Vabs' publications only after Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933. Jews rarely endured direct attacks from Vabs, who placed them in the same camp as Baltic Germans, socialists, and parliamentary blocs. A stereotypical depiction of Jewish wealth was the most common way of expressing antisemitism. Essentially, Vabs promoted the same brand of nationalism as other political parties. Among their priorities was the raising of the Estonian national esteem and self-confidence. As regards antisemitism, the difference between the Estonian and Latvian proto-fascist movements could not be more striking. The Latvian Pērkonkrusts unequivocally designated Jews—alongside Germans, Russians and Poles—as enemies of their independent state. An early political measure embraced by this group was the boycott of Jewish shops.²³ Overseas Jewish commentators suggested several factors that kept the level of antisemitism in interwar Estonia relatively low: the pragmatic outlook of the Estonian people, a small Jewish population, and the relatively insignificant economic power of the Jewish community. That might have prevented the spread of popular jealousy and enmity, thus making Jews a rather unlikely scapegoat in times of potential crisis.²⁴ The very same factors influenced the Estonian government in granting the Jews the official status of a minority group in 1925.

²³ Andres Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 73–77, 146–47.

²⁴ American Jewish Committee, *The Jewish Communities*, 6.

Estonia and the League of Nations

In the context of East Central Europe, Estonia was a relatively homogeneous country. Minorities constituted slightly over 10 percent of the total population of Estonia, compared with the 30 percent average for East Central Europe. Yet Estonia was the most reluctant of the three Baltic countries to sign the international treaty guaranteeing the rights of minorities. The minority issue was detrimental to Estonia's international recognition. For a new state such as Estonia, membership in the League of Nations was synonymous with the acknowledgement of its sovereignty. As a condition for membership in the League of Nations, on December 15, 1920, the three Baltic countries were asked to issue a declaration reaffirming ethnic minority rights. Estonia and Latvia refused to do so and referred to the fact that neither country owed its independence to the Versailles Peace Treaty or Paris Peace Conference. Estonian officials contended that the recommendation was already realized in the Estonian Constitution, which contained a minority clause. In fact, the 1920 Constitution referred only to religious and national equality, without fully incorporating the international requirement that religious differences were not prejudicial to civil and political rights. Another problem was that Estonia did not automatically grant citizenship to all stateless persons, but only to foundlings or individuals born of unknown parents.²⁵

The negotiations between the League of Nations and Estonia regarding minority protection were difficult and protracted. Estonia tried hard to evade the international obligations regarding minorities, viewing such obligations as an infringement of its sovereignty. Lithuania yielded to international pressure first by signing the minority clause in May 1922. Latvia followed suit in July 1923. That made Estonia's position even more awkward. Nevertheless at the last moment Estonia managed to insert a clause into the Minorities Declaration stipulating that no information regarding the violation of minority rights in Estonia could be submitted to the League of Nations from outside the country. That mainly affected Germany, which was thus denied a legal channel of intervening on behalf of ethnic Germans in Estonia. Furthermore, the text of the Declaration essentially prevented the League of Nations Council from taking steps against the potential violations of minority rights in Estonia. The Minori-

²⁵ Jacob Robinson, Oscar Karbach, Max M. Laserson, Nehemiah Robinson, and Marc Vichniak, *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1943), 165–67, 202–203.

ties Declaration was finally signed by Estonia on September 17, 1923. The Minorities Declaration was similar to the Minorities Treaty, as both documents authorized the system of petitions, which ethnic minorities could submit to the League of Nations Secretariat against their respective governments.²⁶

The German, Jewish, Polish, and Russian minorities had petitioned the League of Nations about alleged violations of their rights in the Baltic states even before Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia became part of the world organization. It may be instructive to compare treatment of ethnic minorities in the Baltic countries as reflected in their submissions to the League of Nations. With ethnic minorities forming more than 15 percent of its population, Lithuania received the largest number of complaints (thirty-four), which mainly came from ethnic Poles. With one and two petitions from the Russian and Ukrainian minorities respectively, the remaining four addressed the Jewish plight in Lithuania. Latvia had the highest percentage of minorities (26 percent) in the Baltic. Of the six petitions submitted against the Latvian state, the Baltic German and the Jewish community sent one each. Only two petitions were forwarded to the League of Nations from Estonia, both of them originating from the Baltic German minority. In both cases, the issue at stake was the 1919 land reform.²⁷ The Estonian representative at the League of Nations argued against additional obligations toward ethnic minorities by contending that none of the Jewish, Russian, or Swedish communities had submitted any complaints.²⁸

The fact that Russians and Jews were absent among the complainants does not mean, however, that these two groups were considered constituent peoples of Estonia. The representative body of Estonia's Jews expressed its solidarity with the Jewish Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In fact, it was the AJDC that pressured the League of Nations to make the Baltic states' entry conditional upon signing the Minorities Declaration.

²⁶ Vahur Made, *Eesti ja Rahvaste Liit* [Estonia and the League of Nations] (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 1999), 110–14, 118–19; Rita Putins Peters, "Baltic State Diplomacy and the League of Nations Minorities System," in *The Baltic in International Relations between the Two World Wars*, ed. John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Studia Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1988), 284–91.

²⁷ Herbert von Truhart, *Völkerbund und Minderheitenpetitionen* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1931), 8, 50–51, 86–87, 114–15, 136. See also Otto Junghann, *National Minorities in Europe* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1932), 41–46.

²⁸ German Foreign Office to the German diplomatic mission in Tallinn, November 15, 1922, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter: NARA), T-120/5769.

In the course of negotiations, the Special Reporter on Estonia, referring to the Russian and Jewish newspapers published in France, expressed his satisfaction with the treatment of both minority groups in Estonia. This might be the reason why the clause regarding the status of the Jewish minority was dropped from the draft declaration that Estonia was supposed to sign. As soon as the Estonian state signed the Minorities Declaration, the local Jewish community decided against petitioning.

The Baltic Germans would not have pursued their rights so vigorously had they not felt the overwhelming support of the German government. The Weimar Republic had assumed the role of champion of minorities in Europe. In pursuit of this self-imposed mission, Germany was motivated by a combination of revisionist hopes, *völkisch* ideology, and humanitarian concerns. While the immediate goal of the German international minority policy was the maintenance of close ties with ethnic German communities abroad, the long-term objective was territorial revision. With the exception of the Soviet Union, Weimar Germany was the only large power in Europe interested in enforcing the Minorities Treaty. The pariah status attached to Germany at the Paris Peace Conference killed its proposal to grant “cultural autonomy” to all minorities in Eastern Europe. A similar proposal by Jewish delegations was similarly dismissed. On the whole, the minority crusade of the 1920s failed to achieve any tangible results.²⁹ This was partly due to the double standards of the German minority policy. Germany risked revealing its revisionist or irredentist goals if it decided to rebuke the East European governments for their treatment of minorities.³⁰ Nevertheless, it had an effect on the legislation pertinent to minorities on a national level. The Estonian law on cultural autonomy is a glaring example of this.

The Law on Cultural Autonomy

The law on cultural autonomy, adopted by Estonia in February 1925 and widely praised abroad, was as much a result of goodwill as of political compromise. Although the right to cultural autonomy was effectively

²⁹ Carole Fink, “Defender of Minorities: Germany in the League of Nations, 1926–1933,” *Central European History* 5, no. 3 (1972): 330–32, 335–37.

³⁰ Karl Heinz Grundmann, *Deutschumpolitik zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie am Beispiel der deutsch-baltischen Minderheit in Estland und Lettland* (Hannover: Harro v. Hirschheydt, 1977), 278.

extended to all ethnic minorities, it was specifically intended for the Baltic Germans. A sudden breakthrough in minority legislation occurred in the wake of the communist putsch of December 1924. The abortive coup generated an internal political momentum by creating a sense of national unity. The Estonian government received international acclaim for its benevolent treatment of minorities at a time when the country needed it most. Yet it was not a totally spontaneous act, but rather a calculated move aiming to appease the German minority. The Baltic Germans were awarded cultural autonomy as compensation for both past grievances and anticipated detriment. With regards the impact of the autonomy law on the Jews, it can be said that this group became the unintended beneficiaries of the tripartite relations between the Estonians, Germans, and Russians.

The Baltic German factor played a decisive role in the adoption of the cultural autonomy law in February 1925. The single most important event that affected this was the land reform carried out by the Estonian government six years earlier. Historically, ethnic Germans had owned most of the arable land in Estonia and Latvia. When the Estonian Republic was proclaimed in February 1918, up to 58 percent of all land still belonged to Baltic German landowners, whereas two-thirds of Estonian peasants (about 500,000) owned no land at all. The expropriation of land was thus only a question of time. Given that the peasantry constituted the core of the young Estonian nation, the nominal and abstract value of land for the Estonians was impossible to underestimate. Upon the commencement of a tripartite civil war in Estonia in 1918, the pro-independence faction made a smart move by enlisting the peasants' support with the promise of free land redistribution. Social tensions decreased as the landless peasants acquired pieces of property. Furthermore, the dismantling of large estates symbolized the destruction of the much-hated Baltic German domination of the region.³¹

The land redistribution was carried out more radically in Estonia than in Latvia and Lithuania. The Baltic Germans were never reconciled with the loss of their land. The 1919 land reform stripped ethnic Germans not only of their property but also of their high status. Frustrated, some Baltic Germans immigrated to Germany. The humiliation experienced at the hands of the Estonians made the local German community appeal for re-

³¹ Tiit Rosenberg, "Eesti 1919. aasta maareform: Võrdlusjooni ida- ja kesk-Euroopa maa-dega" [The 1919 land reform in Estonia: A comparison with the countries of East and Central Europe], in *Kaks algust: Eesti Vabariik—1920. ja 1990. aastad*, ed. Jüri Ant (Tallinn: Eesti Riigiarhiiv, 1998), 74, 77.

dress at the League of Nations. Baltic German politicians accused the Estonian and Latvian governments of directly assaulting the German minority by means of the land reform. A joint petition submitted to the League of Nations in February 1921 on behalf of German landowners in Estonia and Latvia augmented the earlier concerns of international Jewish organizations regarding the situation of the Jews in the Baltic states. Consequently, the League of Nations introduced an entrance requirement for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which were now obliged to secure the rights of their minorities. The League of Nations Council was sympathetic toward the Baltic German case, justly arguing that the agrarian law reform in Latvia and Estonia was carried out in a discriminatory fashion and violated the principle of equality before the law. At the same time, Council members were convinced that the expropriation of land, as a means of social and economic consolidation in these two countries, was inevitable.³² Therefore, no action against Estonia was taken.

The Baltic German community in Estonia raised the issue of cultural autonomy for the first time in August 1919. The German minority chose to cooperate with the Estonian majority after having been severely criticized for abstention in the parliamentary vote on Estonian independence a year earlier. From the outset, the Baltic German Party took a leading role in advancing minority rights in Estonia. Built along ethnic lines, the German Baltic Party spoke on behalf of the local community, as well as Germans at large. The law on cultural autonomy was adopted thanks to the unremitting lobbying of the German parliamentary faction. Local Germans thought of cultural autonomy not only as a means of preserving their ethnic identity but also as a way of keeping Estonia within the German/European cultural sphere.³³

The benefit of international publicity did not escape the attention of Estonian politicians. During parliamentary debates on the cultural autonomy law, the League of Nations was occasionally mentioned. Pro-autonomy politicians referred to Estonia's obligation before the League in the realm of minority protection. Nevertheless, the first two drafts were rejected. As indicated earlier, the upsurge of communist activity in Estonia in December 1924 reversed the course of the debate in favor of cultural autonomy for minorities. The Council of the Jewish communities in

³² Putins Peters, "Baltic State Diplomacy," 293–94.

³³ Michael Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen: Die parlamentarische Tätigkeit der deutschbaltischen Parteien in Lettland und Estland* (Bad Godesberg: Verlag wissenschaftliches Archiv Bonn, 1976), 16–18, 79.

Estonia pre-empted the Baltic German Party in sending a thank-you cable to the Parliament.³⁴

There are reasons to believe that the Estonian government traded the cultural autonomy law against one minor, yet symbolically important, concession from the Baltic Germans. On the day immediately after the third reading of the autonomy law on February 5, 1925, Interior Minister Karl Einbund proclaimed the German Lutheran Cathedral in Tallinn to be the property of the Estonian state. The objective of this clearly unconstitutional move was to reduce German influence on church affairs. While the Baltic German community in Estonia generally felt more content than their kinsfolk in Latvia, the Cathedral controversy opened up the barely healed wound inflicted by the land reform. Referring to the recent communist coup, a Baltic German newspaper rhetorically asked why the Estonian authorities would want to endanger political stability in the country at a time when the two communities should close their ranks against a common threat from the east. The Estonian nationalist press picked up on the existing anticommunist sentiment, speculating that to achieve their goals the Baltic Germans may have allied themselves with the Bolsheviks. Rather predictably, the allegations of a base motive behind the cultural autonomy law were denied. The international media supported the Baltic Germans' case, comparing the Estonians' handling of the issue to that of the Russians during the Russification campaign of the late nineteenth century. Despite negative publicity abroad, the Estonian government held on to the Cathedral, partially because the weak Weimar Republic decided to stay out of the debate.³⁵ The Baltic Germans, as a landless and thus powerless minority, clung to cultural autonomy in order to recover whatever little sovereign status they were left with. In addition, a provision in the autonomy law for self-taxation served as a minor compensation for the confiscated land.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 108–109, 112.

³⁵ Mikko Ketola, *The Nationality Question in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1918–1939* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Church History, 2000), 144–70.

³⁶ Cornelius Hasselblatt, "Der Gedanke der Kulturautonomie und seine gesetzliche und organisatorische Verwirklichung," in *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-estnischen Verhältnisses*, ed. Boris Meissner, Dietrich A. Loeber, and Cornelius Hasselblatt (Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 1997), 41.

Jews as a Minority

Jews in Estonia had to deal with problems that other minorities in the country did not have. The most important issue was the recognition of Jews as an ethnic minority. Back in 1918, the Estonian Provisional Government posed as a minority-friendly body, recognizing the Germans, Russians, Swedes, and Latvians as ethnic minorities. Unlike other minority groups, however, the Jews did not have a ministerial representative within the government. By the time the Constituent Assembly started its work in late spring 1919, the minorities had already lost their mandate in the government. The provisional constitution no longer mentioned the right to autonomy discussed earlier. Estonian politicians expressed concern that autonomy could potentially damage the principle of Estonia's sovereignty.³⁷ The 1920 constitution listed only three ethnicities that were *historically* connected to Estonia: the Germans, the Russians, and the Swedes.³⁸

The non-inclusion of Jews into basic legal documents should be attributed to the inconspicuousness of the Jews in Estonia rather than to malicious intent. With no previous experience of political mobilization, the Estonian Jews lacked the voice necessary to get their message heard. The Jews' limited visibility in the local political arena was contrasted with a strong tradition of political organization among the Baltic Germans. In contrast to Latvia, the Estonian Germans made an early decision to cooperate with other ethnic groups in pursuit of minority rights. Their contribution to the proclamation of the cultural autonomy law exemplified such a common effort. Estonian parliamentarians of German, Russian, and Swedish descent jointly presented the first draft of the law in spring 1921. In the course of Estonia's negotiations with the League of Nations, a German MP submitted a declaration in the name of the three minority parties requesting international guarantees to the country's ethnic minorities. In retrospect, the German-Swedish electoral bloc in the Estonian Parliament closely resembled a genuine ethnic minorities' party.³⁹

The provisional naturalization law denied citizenship to a majority of the Jews in Estonia. Due to the fact that Estonia lay outside the Pale of

³⁷ Alenius, "Under the Conflicting Pressures," 35–36.

³⁸ Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik*, 158.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 161, 172; Garleff, "Die Parteiorganisation der baltischen Deutschen und ihre Beteiligung an der parlamentarischen Arbeit von 1920 bis 1934," in *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Estland*, 55.

Settlement, prior to 1917 Jews could not officially register as permanent residents of Estonia as the naturalization law had specified. In the absence of any provision dealing specifically with the Jewish case, Jews were relegated by default to the category of legal aliens. The Congress of the Jewish Communities in Estonia, which convened for the first time in Reval (Tallinn) between May 11 and 16, 1919, was determined to fight until all Estonian Jews who so wished could acquire Estonian citizenship. Local Jews designated Estonia as their home country, simultaneously staking their share in the Zionist program of the colonization of Palestine. As a preferred form of settlement within Estonia, the Congress specified national cultural autonomy.⁴⁰ If the Estonian authorities were so well disposed toward the country's ethnic minorities, as has been argued retrospectively, one wonders why the Jews only received the desired status five years later, even then largely thanks to the concerted effort of the Baltic German minority.

It was not without assistance from the Baltic German parliamentary faction that the Jews finally received ethnic minority status in Estonia. As a result of protracted debates in the parliament, the law on cultural autonomy of February 12, 1925, recognized as a minority any ethnic group of three thousand or more.⁴¹ Only Estonian citizens were to be counted, however. Interestingly enough, the U.S. Consul in Estonia inferred from the document that only the Germans, Russians, and Swedes qualified as ethnic minorities. The Consul doubted that the Estonian government would consider the request of the Jewish minority for cultural autonomy.⁴² The autonomy law was meant to appease the Baltic Germans, who were indeed the first to take full advantage of their new status. Two months after the promulgation of the law, the German parliamentary faction and the German cultural organization appealed to the government to call for the elections to the Cultural Council. On April 17, 1925, the request was granted. The cultural self-government of the German minority in Estonia officially assumed its duties on November 4, 1925.

⁴⁰ Congress of the Jewish Communities in Estonia, resolution, May 11, 1919, YIVO, Vilno Archives, RG-33/13.

⁴¹ Tatiana Shor, "Kulturnaia avtonomia evreev v Estonii: Podgotovka i vvedenie (1925–1927)" [Jewish cultural autonomy in Estonia in 1925–1927], in *Evrei v meniaiushchemsia mire: Materialy Soi mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, Riga, 16–17 sentiabria 2003 g.*, ed. Herman Branover and Ruvin Ferber (Riga: University of Latvia, 2005), 294–96.

⁴² U.S. Legation in Estonia, "Survey of Conditions in Esthonia for the Month of February 1925," March 10, 1925; *ibid.* for the month of September 1925, October 19, 1925, NARA, M-1170/2.

It took the Jews much longer to implement cultural autonomy. On October 19, 1925, the Tallinn Jewish community announced, in the name of Estonian Jewry, its desire to set up cultural self-government. A half-year delay was obviously caused by the provision that set the required number of members of the respective minority with Estonian citizenship at three thousand. The Estonian Jews scraped together just enough citizens of Estonia (3,045) to qualify for autonomous status. The rest of the community, some 1,500, claimed other citizenships or no citizenship at all.⁴³ That further strengthened the supposition that the drafters of the cultural autonomy law did not take Jews into account. The government authorized elections to the Jewish Cultural Council in March 1926; the elections took place between May 23 and 25. Taking into consideration the voting pattern, Jews tended to be more enthusiastic about cultural autonomy than Baltic Germans. Seventy-one and 67 percent of registered Jewish and German voters, respectively, participated in the election to the first Cultural Council. The gap had widened by the time the voters went to the ballot box for the second time three years later; 81 percent of the Jewish electorate cast their vote, as opposed to 64 percent among the Baltic Germans. For the Jews, cultural autonomy was the end goal, while for the Baltic Germans it was more of a tactical retreat, which they weighed against the contemporary political situation in Germany. Cultural autonomy came at a cost, however. By embracing autonomy, the Jewish and German minorities pledged adherence to the principle of separating culture from politics. Cultural self-government precluded engagement in political activities.⁴⁴

The idea of Jewish extraterritorial autonomy, as cherished by such Diaspora ideologists as Simon Dubnov, made its most powerful appearance in Estonia.⁴⁵ Cultural autonomy entitled Jews to a system of cultural institutions and limited self-taxation. Of particular significance for Jews was the right to organize and administer public and private schools in their native language. As was the case in Latvia and in Lithuania prior to 1924, the state subsidized minority education. The state provided 2.5 million Estonian marks out of the seven million necessary for sustaining Jewish

⁴³ Eugen Maddison, *Die nationalen Minderheiten Estlands und ihre Rechte* (Tallinn, 1930), 30–33; Ewald Ammende, *Die Nationalitäten in den Staaten Europas* (Vienna, Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1931), 22; Shor, “Kulturnaia avtonomia evreev v Estonii,” 296–97.

⁴⁴ Werner Hasselblatt, “Hat sich die Kulturaautonomie in Estland gewährt?” *Nation und Staat* 4 (1930/31): 443.

⁴⁵ Mendelsohn, *The Jews*, 254.

education. Yet the autonomy law did not address the issue of welfare, which was among Jews' priorities.⁴⁶

The organization of Jewish cultural autonomy was as follows. Registered Jewish voters in the seven largest Estonian cities elected twenty-seven members of the Cultural Council. Seven members were further voted into the cultural self-government, the executive of the cultural autonomy. Hirsh Aisenstadt served as the head of the self-government until its dissolution by the Soviets in the summer of 1940. The Jewish Cultural Council scrambled for money, as its members, the majority of whom were low-income artisans, failed to pay their dues regularly. Nevertheless, with whatever means they had, the Jewish minority ran thirty-two different organizations and associations. All the benefits that Jews received from cultural autonomy were overshadowed by one particular aspect that had a long-lasting impact on the community—further isolation from other ethnic groups, first and foremost the Estonians. As Jews further coalesced into a tight-knit community, contact with the Estonian population became less frequent.⁴⁷

Within the context of international legislation on minorities, the Estonian law on cultural autonomy was a significant achievement. Of the three Baltic countries, Estonia honored its obligations with regard to the German and Jewish minorities most consistently. Lithuania was the first country in Europe to introduce national extraterritorial autonomy for its Jewish minority, in 1919. However, that autonomy was built on precedent rather than on a concrete legal basis, which enabled the Lithuanian government to dismantle it five years later. Latvian Jews received cultural autonomy in 1920 and enjoyed it uninterrupted throughout the period of independence. However, the Latvian model of cultural autonomy only covered educational institutions. The international community regarded the Estonian law on cultural autonomy as an exemplary piece of legislation. The League of Nations Secretariat distributed a copy of the law among its member states. Autonomy for the Slovenian minority in Carinthia, Austria, was drawn after the Estonian model. Even the Canadian solution to the minority problem bore similarities to the Estonian prototype.⁴⁸ Jewish organizations joined in praising Estonia for its benevolent

⁴⁶ Ammende, *Die Nationalitäten*, 23, 24; Ruutsoo, "Rahvusvähemused," 12; Toomas Paul, "Eestlaste ja juutide suhetest" [On Estonian-Jewish relations], *Looming* 2 (1997): 247; Shor, "Kulturnaia avtonomia evreev v Estonii," 294.

⁴⁷ Pflug, "Aspekte jüdischen Lebens," 54–55; Gurin-Loov and Gramberg, *Eesti Juudi Kogukond* [Estonian Jewish community] (Tallinn: self-published, 2001), 11.

⁴⁸ Hasselblatt, "Der Gedanke der Kulturaautonomie," 46.

treatment of minorities. In 1927, the Jewish National Fund in Palestine presented the Estonian government with a certificate of appreciation. The entry in the *Golden Book* thus read: "As a sign of gratitude for the first historical deed in the history of Israel through the gift of national and cultural autonomy to the Jewish minority in Estonia." Yet I would be somewhat cautious to use the abovementioned document as definite proof that Estonia had avoided the ills of antisemitism altogether.⁴⁹ If we look carefully at the text of the certificate, we see that it praised an unprecedented event in Jewish rather than Estonian history. The document was advocated by recent Estonian Jewish immigrants in Palestine, and presented by the Zionist Organization in Estonia; as a subsidiary of the Zionist movement, the Jewish National Fund in Palestine was mainly interested in bringing Jews to *Eretz Israel*, and by default opposed to creating favorable conditions for them in host countries. In other words, the Golden Book certificate was of largely symbolic significance.

The idea of cooperation among minorities originated in Berlin and certainly bore political connotations. By encouraging teamwork, the German authorities wanted to refute the claims of Germany's self-interest in promoting minority rights (which was not far from the truth). In Estonia, the Jewish alongside the Swedish minority, came to be viewed as the biggest ally of the Baltic Germans. Both groups found themselves on the margins of Estonian society and lacked irredentist inclinations. In other words, it was politically safe for Baltic Germans to cooperate with the Swedish and Jewish minorities. With the Swedes, the Baltic Germans formed an electoral bloc in 1929. Since the Jews abstained from parliamentary activities, the Baltic Germans expressed their support for the Jewish minority in a different fashion. In July 1927, the leaders of the German minorities in Europe convened for a meeting in Tallinn. When the discussion turned to the admission of Zionists to the international minorities' congress, Paul Schiemann of Latvia was the only one who voted in its favor.⁵⁰ Taking into account the similarities between the Jewish and German minorities in Eastern Europe, it comes as no surprise that the two groups cooperated politically in Estonia.⁵¹ Yet the relationship between the Baltic German and Jewish minorities could barely be deemed teamwork. Rather, the latter group took advantage of a free passage that the former broke through the thick ice of integral nationalism. The institutional collaboration be-

⁴⁹ Parming, "The Jewish Community," 252, 254.

⁵⁰ Grundmann, *Deutschumpolitik*, 290–91.

⁵¹ Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, 131.

tween the two communities continued well into the late 1930s, when Estonia gave in to authoritarianism.

From March 1934 the country was virtually controlled by two men, acting President Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner. Päts replaced the multiple-party system with a corporate system. All existing political parties and organizations were abolished in favor of the government-sponsored Patriotic League (*Isamaaliit*). Laidoner assumed the double position of commander in chief of the Estonian armed forces and minister of the interior, in which capacity he was authorized to ban strikes and meetings. Freedom of speech was lost to censorship. Although the dual dictatorship of Päts-Laidoner presented the new political system as unique for Estonia, the corporate state principle introduced in Estonia closely resembled that of Mussolini's Italy.⁵² The country's minorities, who preferred the conservatives to the radical right, by and large supported the coup. The German Cultural Council hastened to express its loyalty to the new old regime, which in its turn promised to keep the minority policy intact. Despite the growing chauvinism, the Päts government avoided mistreating minorities so as not to bring grist to the mill of the intellectual opposition.⁵³

While the new legislation did not directly affect the minorities, it reduced their status somewhat. As the parliament—by then obsolete—was transformed into a bicameral body, Baron Wilhelm Wrangell came to represent the interests of the German and Jewish minorities in the State Council. The 1938 Constitution allocated to the two cultural councils just one seat in the Chamber of Representatives. The seat should go “to the oldest cultural self-government, as long as its membership exceed 10,000.” The Jews wondered whether it would not be better to explicitly state that it was the Germans that had to choose the delegate to the Second Chamber. Dr. Heinrich Gutkin, a Jewish lawyer, then proposed to rotate the seat between the two cultural self-governments.⁵⁴ Because of the divergences between the German and Jewish minorities, the head of state made a Solomon decision by assigning Gutkin to the Chamber of Representatives.⁵⁵

The institution of cultural autonomy in Estonia survived the crisis of the 1930s almost unscathed. Attacks on cultural autonomy mounted as the

⁵² U.S. Legation in Estonia to the Secretary of State, March 9, March 20, May 28, 1935, NARA, M-1170/10.

⁵³ “Lage: Estland,” *Nation und Staat* 8 (1934/35): 795, 796.

⁵⁴ “Die Lage: Estland,” *Nation und Staat* 10 (1936/7): 773, 774.

⁵⁵ Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik*, 185.

economic depression took hold. Taking into account the background of the autonomy law, criticism focused on the German cultural self-government, which was now portrayed as a potential seedbed of separatism. Opponents of the autonomy law reminded their readers of a clause that specified that minorities could promote their culture only insofar as "it did not contradict the interests of the state."⁵⁶ The Jews, as before, were out of the picture. Verbal attacks on minority rights did not persist for very long, largely because Estonia weathered the world depression with less pain than the rest of Eastern Europe.⁵⁷

Only two of the four eligible minorities in Estonia took advantage of cultural autonomy. The problem lay with the Swedish and Russian minorities rather than with the Estonian government. The Swedes, who lived in compact settlements on the Estonian west coast, earned their livelihood by fishing. The Swedish-speaking minority—next to the Roma—constituted the poorest and most isolated ethnic group in Estonia. The Swedes could not sustain their autonomy, which they probably did not need as long as they could retain Swedish as the language of instruction in their schools.⁵⁸ The situation with the Russian minority was more complex. The Russians did not go beyond discussing the prospects of cultural autonomy at several regional meetings. A leading Russian Estonian intellectual, Mikhail Kurchinskii, who had a Europe-wide reputation in the field of minority protection, gave the following reasons that prevented the local Russians from claiming their legitimate right to cultural autonomy. The Russian press in Estonia did not pay much attention to the law on cultural autonomy, which was originally published in Estonian. In spite of Baltic German support, the local Russians failed to forge unity among their ranks essential for the implementation of autonomy. Russian city dwellers did not share a common language with the Russian peasants in the eastern borderlands. The level of national self-consciousness among the latter group was remarkably low. The Russian intellectual elite could not bridge the internal split that ran through numerous cultural and political organizations. Otherwise, the quantity did not compensate for the quality of political organization among the Russians, who fell far behind other minorities in this respect. At the same time, the pattern of German and Jewish settlement in Estonia differed from that of the Russians and

⁵⁶ "Estland," *Nation und Staat* 5 (1931/32): 327.

⁵⁷ R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After* (London: Routledge, 1997), 103.

⁵⁸ Hjalmar Pöhl, "Die Estlandschweden," *Nation und Staat* 11 (1937/38): 600.

Swedes; it would be easier and less costly to administer cultural autonomy in the eastern part of the country where most Russians lived. According to Professor Kurchinskii, relative poverty and arrogance ranked among the main causes for Russians' passivity toward the idea of cultural autonomy.⁵⁹

When the Russians finally reached a consensus on the issue of autonomy in the late 1930s, the authoritarian system was already in place. The question surfaced during the debates on minority representation in the National Assembly. The Russian minority suddenly embraced the idea of cultural autonomy as a means of halting the further Estonianization of their schools and surnames. The Alliance of Russian Educational and Philanthropic Associations submitted a formal request for cultural autonomy in October 1937. Kurchinskii was supposed to head the election committee. The Estonian government rejected the appeal on the pretext that the new constitution did not provide for the establishment of new cultural self-governments. That decision came as no surprise given the effort that government officials had invested in convincing the Russian population to abandon the idea of cultural autonomy. The peasantry backed off immediately after they learned about the additional taxes that accompanied it (one Estonian crown per year). In June 1939 Russian organizations decided to renew their efforts on behalf of cultural autonomy, but to no avail.⁶⁰

The German and Russian minorities received different treatment in Estonia during the 1930s. The inconsistency of the Estonian minority policy reflected the attitude adopted by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany toward their respective ethnic relatives abroad. While the Soviet Union had effectively stopped promoting ethnic diversity at home and denied support to Russians living abroad, Germany successfully played the *Volksdeutsche* card in Eastern Europe, including Estonia. Therefore, the authoritarian regime of Päts did not have to look over its shoulder when it refused to extend cultural autonomy to the Russian minority. The situation was very different with respect to Baltic Germans, whom the Estonian authorities treated favorably in order not to spoil Estonia's relations with the Third Reich.

⁵⁹ "Von einer russischen Kulturselbstverwaltung in Estland;" "Die Lage: Estland;" Mikhail Kurchinskii, "Kulturautonomie und die russische Minderheit in Estland," *Nation und Staat* 2 (1928/29): 642–43, 716–17, 775–84.

⁶⁰ "Die Lage: Estland," *Nation und Staat* 11 (1937/38); Sergei Isakov, *Russkoe natsional'noe men'shinstvo v Estonskoi Respublike (1918–1940)* [Russian ethnic minority in Estonian Republic, 1918–1940] (Tartu and St. Petersburg: Cripta, 2000), 44–47.

First and foremost, Germany increased its presence in Estonia economically. By the second half of the 1930s Germany had become Estonia's major trade partner. The Estonian shale oil industry had reached an unprecedented level of development in the second half of the 1930s thanks to profitable contracts with German companies. Until then, the main importers of Estonian shale oil were Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania. From 1935 on, the German Navy became the largest consumer of Estonian oil products. In 1939 Estonian phosphates were all but sold to Germany five years in advance. By that time, foreign owners—predominantly German—controlled two-thirds of the private companies in Estonia. A mixture of political and economic calculations drew Estonia into the German sphere of influence.⁶¹

The first signs of rapprochement with Nazi Germany appeared in the summer of 1934. Unmistakably, the turn in Estonian-German relations coincided with the beginning of trade negotiations with the German Navy. By 1935, Estonia had irreversibly decided on its long-term political orientation toward Nazi Germany. General Johan Laidoner, head of the Estonian armed forces, announced in March of 1935 that the Soviet Union was Estonia's only enemy and that Estonian soldiers had just one task at hand—to fight Bolshevism. From 1936 onward, Estonia essentially had two foreign policies: an official policy of neutrality and an unofficial policy that advanced Estonian-German relations. Pro-German policy manifested itself in overtly friendly statements and coordination of Estonian foreign and defense policy with that of Berlin.⁶²

Mutual economic interests were a guarantee against infringements on minority rights in Estonia. The German cultural self-government, the Baltic German Party, German-language schools—none of these institutions would have survived without financial support from Baltic German businesses.⁶³ It would therefore have been suicidal for the Estonian government to kill the law on cultural autonomy without risking alienating both Baltic German and Nazi German capital. As in 1925, when the autonomy law was promulgated, the Jews once again had very little involvement in

⁶¹ Manfred Rasch, "Zur Mineralölpolitik der Kriegsmarine: Dokumente aus dem Jahre 1935," *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 71, no. 1 (1985): 71–85.

⁶² Magnus Ilmjärv, *Nõukogude Liidu ja Saksamaa vahel: Balti riigid ja Soome 1934–1940* [Between the Soviet Union and Germany: Baltic states and Finland, 1934–1940] (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Science, 1993), 12, 16–18, 31, 35, 40–43, 52–53, 60, 79.

⁶³ Vesa Vasara, "Die deutschbaltische Minderheit in Estland in der Zwischenkriegszeit: Wirtschaft und Finanzen," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 44, no. 4 (1995): 587–88.

the circumstances that enabled them to thrive in Estonia. Paradoxically, the safety of the Estonian Jews was guaranteed by the outcome of Estonian-German economic cooperation. However, it had a price tag attached to it—silencing news about the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Conclusion

There is no one definite answer to the question why the authoritarian regime of Konstantin Päts (1934–40) left the minority legislation intact. What is clear, however, is that the decision to uphold cultural autonomy involved a level of political calculation. For one thing, the Estonian leadership did not want to lose the international prestige it had gained by introducing the autonomy law back in 1925.⁶⁴ Economic and political dependency on Nazi Germany was another possible reason why Päts decided to leave the Baltic German minority in peace. As regards the Jews, they followed in the Germans' footsteps and were arguably able to enjoy their autonomous status as long as the Estonian government tolerated the *Volksdeutsche*. As for the Nazis, they explained the decision of the Estonian government to uphold cultural autonomy for the German and Jewish minorities in terms of the pragmatism of the Estonians, who supposedly viewed the ethnic Germans as a cultural asset.⁶⁵

In comparison with other East Central European countries, including Latvia and Lithuania, Jews led a comfortable life in independent Estonia. The level of popular antisemitism in Estonia, even by West European standards, was low.⁶⁶ The Estonian government—much to the approval of the international community—granted the Jewish minority cultural autonomy, which it never attempted to revoke. At the same time, cultural autonomy reduced interaction between Estonians and Jews as the latter became more self-contained. The most troubling feature of the Jewish experience in interwar Estonia was the inability to enter state service. That

⁶⁴ Wilhelm Wrangell, "Zur Situation der Deutschbalten in Estland bis zur Umsiedlung," in *Zwischen Reval und St. Petersburg: Erinnerungen von Estländern aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, ed. Henning von Wistinghausen (Weissenhorn: Anton H. Konrad Verlag, 1993), 402–403.

⁶⁵ Roderich Ungern-Sternberg, *Die Bevölkerungsverhältnisse in Estland, Lettland, Litauen und Polen: Eine demographisch-statistische Studie* (Berlin: Verlagsbuchhandlung von Richard Schoetz, 1939), 16.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kari Alenius, "Estonian Anti-Semitism in the Early 1920s," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 54, no. 1 (2005): 36–55.

did not, however, cause an outflow of Jews from Estonia in any significant numbers. Instead, in the late 1930s Estonia became home to a hundred or so Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany. It can even be argued that, of all the ethnic minorities, it was the Jews—taking into account their low starting point—who fared best in independent Estonia. Only the Baltic Germans had the same level of organization as the Jews. At the same time, unlike ethnic Germans or Russians, Jews had never featured prominently in Estonians' consciousness. This had something to do with the geopolitical position of Estonia and the relations it had with other countries and peoples. In short, the manner in which Estonians treated the Jews in the 1920s and 1930s, and the sudden, yet explicable, change in their attitude toward them in the early 1940s, derived from the Estonians' own self-image. Estonians tolerated the Jews as long as they stayed away from the country's mainstream. The law of cultural minority had bestowed certain rights upon Estonia's Jews. Ironically, it also increased their isolation from the majority population, who continued to view them as an alien body.

CHAPTER 3

The Soviet Occupation of Estonia in 1940–41 and the Jews

Until now the history of the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940 and 1941 has only marginally been related to the Holocaust. The flight and evacuation of Jews in the face of Nazi invasion has also received scant attention as far as Estonia is concerned.¹ It is a common knowledge that Soviet historiography has not addressed the Nazi mass murder of the Jews as a separate subject. In the context of Jewish history, however, the short-lived Soviet occupation was overshadowed by the Nazi genocide that followed. A few studies that have been published in Israel are based primarily on survivor testimonies.² The overreliance on eyewitness accounts obviously had to do with the fact that Soviet archives were off limits to Western historians. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union such problems temporarily ceased to exist. Even then, certain factors continue to negatively affect the progress of research. In the Estonian case, the KGB spirited away a significant portion of records from the archives of the Communist Party of Estonia (now a branch of the Estonian National Archives) to Moscow in 1991. At the moment of writing, some archival collections were still in the process of systematization. For that reason, to give just one example, the plight of those Estonian Jews who fled to the Soviet Union proper prior to the Nazi invasion cannot be adequately addressed. Since the few available studies deal primarily with Jews in Esto-

¹ Cf. Mordechai Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation of Soviet Jews at the Time of the Nazi Invasion: Politics and Realities," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 77.

² Cf. Levin, "Estonian Jews in the U.S.S.R. (1941–1945)," 273–97; Levin, "The Fateful Decision: The Flight of the Jews into the Soviet Interior in the Summer of 1941," 115–42; Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets*.

nia's two largest cities of Tallinn and Tartu, the present chapter focuses on the provincial city of Narva.

Estonian Jews on the Eve of War

As shown in the previous chapters, some 4,500 Jews in Estonia constituted a fairly marginal group. With big Jewish-owned businesses concentrated in the capital city, the only company of a comparable size in Narva was the Forest sawmill ran by Samuel Minkov. This business, too, ceased to exist when its owner left for Palestine.³ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped to set up Jewish cooperative banks in Narva, Tartu, and Tallinn in the mid-1930s. Jewish participation in Estonian politics was almost nonexistent. Throughout the entire period of democratic rule, not a single Jewish deputy was elected to the Estonian Parliament.⁴ By tacit agreement Jews customarily voted for the socialist representative August Rei. Limited involvement in political life was compensated by active participation in local Jewish political movements. Zionism enjoyed universal support. In contrast, neither the Social Democratic Labor Bund nor the suppressed Communist Party had any considerable influence among the Jewish population.⁵ The Zionists in Estonia maintained close ties with their peers in Latvia (to be precise in Riga), and to a lesser extent in Lithuania and Poland. The border to Soviet Russia, however, was permanently sealed following Estonia's independence in 1918. Except for rare cases of immigration and emigration, local Jews maintained no contact with their coreligionists in the Soviet Union.

Jewish-Gentile relations in Estonia were underlined by two significant factors: the rise of nationalism within Estonian society and the Jews' gravitation toward the Russians rather than Estonians. In this part of Eastern Europe, Jews historically used Russian almost on par with Yiddish. Although Jews sent their children to Russian as well as Estonian elementary schools, when it came to high school, they usually opted for the Russian-language education. As typically explained by Jewish parents, this

³ Interview with Ilya Dubin, Tallinn, June 26–29, 1995. Minkov originally came from Minsk province. He moved to Narva in 1905 at the age of twenty-one (ERA, 14/14/2214).

⁴ Helmut Krausnick and Hans Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1981), 319.

⁵ Interview with Dubin.

choice stemmed from the insufficient command of Estonian.⁶ In accordance with the 1934 law, children had to enroll into Estonian schools, in the event there were no schools with the children's native language (in this case, Yiddish) as the language of instruction. The campaign of Estonianization pursued in the mid-1930s (e.g., making one's surname sound more Estonian) had only a negligible effect on Jews.⁷

Despite the moderation of Estonia's policy toward minorities—as exemplified by the law on cultural autonomy from February 1925—ethnic-based prejudice did not disappear overnight. Thus Jews might not get served in a cafe or restaurant, while individual manifestations of antisemitism found their way into the popular press.⁸ A tabloid poignantly called *Juut* (Jew) even appeared for a short time in Tallinn. The army remained perhaps the most persistent holdout of antisemitism; for all practical purposes not a single Jewish officer was to be found among the army ranks.⁹ Commander in Chief General Johan Laidoner announced to students at the Military College: “We should be happy that we have only a few Jews. We acquired a good habit from Tsarist Russia—to despise the Jews.”¹⁰ Modeling itself on fascist and pro-Nazi organizations, the Estonian War Veterans' League adopted an activist policy in 1933. However, after its suppression in 1934, Vabs was compelled to look abroad for targets of its antisemitic outbursts.¹¹

Among many factors that shaped the subsequent Jewish reaction to the Soviet takeover one is of particular significance: Jews were not accepted for state service in independent Estonia.¹² It was virtually impossible for a Jew to get a position as a government notary public, attorney, or doctor. Consequently, Jews could only practice law or medicine privately. Accounting for the falling numbers of non-Jewish patients, after 1933 only eighty-five Jewish doctors were able to practice medicine, for example.¹³

⁶ Records of the Education Department of Narva Municipal Administration, ERA, 2536/1/212.

⁷ Interview with Ester Maslovsky, June 21, 1994, and June 28, 1995.

⁸ *Põhja Kodu*, January 13, 1922, and August 6, 1934.

⁹ Levin, “Estonian Jews,” 274.

¹⁰ *Estoniskii narod v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuz, 1941–1945* [Estonian people in the great patriotic war of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945], ed. Leonid Lentsmann (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1973), 452.

¹¹ Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 372–73, 319; Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia*, 73–74.

¹² Levin, “Estonian Jews,” 274.

¹³ Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 319.

Women in particular had a hard time finding work.¹⁴ In the absence of documentary proof of employment discrimination, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence. Jews were indeed turned down for the simplest of jobs insofar they were offered by state agencies even to the slightest degree. For instance, the mayor of Narva, citing a relevant government decree, refused to hire a Jewish boy for temporary work with the city council alongside other high school students. The work itself consisted of collecting data about the number of cars and horse-drawn transport moving on certain streets.¹⁵

Whereas one can track internal migration on the basis of Jewish nationality lists (e.g., Estonian citizens entitled to vote in the Jewish Cultural Council elections), establishing the exact number of Jews who emigrated abroad is rather difficult. Unofficial data is all that historians may rely on. Thus some twenty-three people, that is, about 10 percent of the city's Jewish population, moved out of Narva during the interwar period.¹⁶ All of them immigrated to Palestine, motivated by the vision of a future Jewish state on the one hand and the lack of prospects within Estonia itself on the other. Predictably, then, ideological youths and affluent individuals predominated among the Jewish emigrants.

As far as Estonian Jews are concerned, the statistics leave much to be desired. The number of Jews in Estonia on the eve of the Second World War is based on the findings of the 1934 national census, without correction for the subsequent five-year period. According to the 1934 census, 188 Jews lived in Narva; in 1939, based on municipal statistics, the corresponding number was 159, that is, 16 percent lower.¹⁷ Running slightly ahead of the story, one should probably take into account those Jews who came to Estonia following the Soviet annexation. Hence, ironically, the most reliable source for Jewish statistics in Estonia prior to June 1941 proves the data compiled by the German Security Police and the Security Service (*Sicherheitspolizei und der Sicherheitsdienst*) after the Nazi invasion. These lists tend to be rather accurate for they did not account for Jews who had emigrated between 1934 and 1940 yet included those who had arrived from the Soviet Union the previous year. All available data thus aligned, the 1934 population census may require a 4 to 7 percent correlation. This proviso is actually quite significant in view of the unreal-

¹⁴ Interview with Ester Maslovsky.

¹⁵ Interview with Dubin.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Berg, "The Peculiarities," 465; *Põhja Kodu*, January 27, 1939.

istic figures regarding the prewar Jewish population of Estonia appearing in certain publications.¹⁸

Instructive is the reaction of Estonian Jews toward the Nazis' seizure of power in Germany. It would not be incorrect to say that a majority of Jews took it rather calmly. Nazi influence seems to have emboldened antisemitism in Estonia. This manifested, for example, in demands to reduce the number of Jewish students in institutions of higher learning.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it had no effect on state policy and no exodus of Jews from Estonia ensued.²⁰ What local newspapers reported was basically isolated incidents. On May 1, 1933, International Workers Day, the German consulate in Narva hoisted the old imperial flag, now bearing a swastika in its corner; five days later Jewish Boy Scouts reported to the police that swastikas had been tarred onto the windows and doors of the group's meeting place.²¹

While Jewish newspapers in prewar Poland informed their readers in detail about acts of discrimination and state-sponsored antisemitism in Nazi Germany, this was not the case in Estonia for a local Jewish press as such did not exist.²² Alarming accounts reached Estonia via Latvian and Lithuanian publications, which would definitely have a far greater effect had they been published locally.²³ Estonian newspapers did report on the most egregious instances of anti-Jewish violence in Germany such as the so-called Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, and so on.²⁴ The way it was reported, however, reflected the general trend in Estonian foreign policy from the mid-1930s onward. The Estonian state found itself politically isolated. It was facing the fundamental challenge of maneuvering between two giants, the Soviet Union and Germany. At that, maintaining neutrality was becoming increasingly difficult. Estonia confronted a dilemma as to which of the two, Moscow or Berlin, posed the greater danger. Most Estonians believed it was the Soviet Union. Even if the policy of Nazi terror

¹⁸ Cf. Martin Gilbert, *Endlösung: Die Vertreibung und Vernichtung der Juden. Ein Atlas* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 74.

¹⁹ "Estonia" in: *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 449.

²⁰ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 275.

²¹ *Põhja Kodu*, May 4 and 6, 1933.

²² Cf. Andrzej Żbikowski, "Żydzi polscy pod okupacją sowiecką, 1939–1941" [Polish Jews under Soviet occupation, 1939–1941], *Studia z Dziejów Żydów w Polsce: Materiały dla szkół średnich i wyższych* 2 (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1995), 56.

²³ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 274.

²⁴ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 10.

was not passed over in silence, therefore, there clearly was a tendency not to overemphasize the uglier sides of Nazism. As a result, only a tiny portion of Nazi crimes against Jews found their way onto the pages of the major Estonian newspapers.

Mordechai Altshuler has speculated that the local press covered the persecution of Jews in Germany. Only muffled accounts, though, reached Jews living outside of major urban centers. Radio was probably the most objective, as well as accessible, source of information about the tide of violence about to engulf Europe. Estonian Jews, according to Dov Levin, took part in the boycott of Nazi Germany.²⁵ As a matter of principle, Minikov's sawmill in Narva supplied products to customers in Britain and the Netherlands only; as a "Jewish enterprise," it refused to sell to German companies, even though they offered higher prices.²⁶

The next important question is what did people in Estonia know about the Soviet Union at the time? For all practical purposes, they had even less information about the Soviet Union than they had about Germany. At any rate, the sinister purges of 1937 went largely unnoticed in Estonia, also by Jews. Whereas Jews were publicly blamed for colluding with the Soviet Union (General Alexander Tõnisson reportedly addressed a Jewish soldier in formation as follows: "You still have your eyes fixed on the Soviet Union"), such generic accusations were groundless, to say the least.²⁷ No doubt, Soviet propaganda did exert a certain influence, especially on the lower social and economic strata of Estonia's Russian population. The Soviet trade agency Torgsin operated in Narva through a Jewish cooperative bank, though it does not allow for any far-reaching conclusions.²⁸ As Eugenia Gurin-Loov has argued, Jews by and large feared the Bolsheviks as much as they did the Nazis.²⁹

Soviet Redemption and Soviet Terror

On June 21, 1940, the Soviet Army entered Estonia. Whereas in the past one received holiday greetings on Easter or Estonia's Independence Day, on June 26 a local Narva newspaper wished "Good Luck to the

²⁵ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 274.

²⁶ Interview with Dubin.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Põhja Kodu*, November 22, 1935.

²⁹ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 10.

Country's New Government Guiding Estonia on its Path to a Bright Future." Among the well-wishers were five Jews. Still more names stood under a congratulatory message in connection with Estonia's "admission to the USSR."³⁰ The cosigners were precisely the sorts of people who had the greatest reason to fear the Bolsheviks: shopkeepers, jewelers, and the like.³¹

On July 21, exactly one month after annexation, the newly elected Cultural Council of the Jewish National Minority convened its first meeting. In the presence of twenty-seven council members, a representative of the new government read the following announcement:

All self-governing bodies elected by the former plutocratic clique are liquidated. . . . Led by Jewish bourgeois circles, the Jewish cultural self-government was essentially a reactionary anti-popular organization and must likewise be liquidated. . . . By bestowing cultural autonomy upon the Jewish national minority, the Estonian antisemitic plutocracy in fact had its own class interests in mind: it was trying to influence Jewish bankers in England and America to extend it a line of credit. . . . In the free Estonian SSR there is no national dissension and no oppression. Hence, separate representation of the Jewish bourgeoisie in the form of cultural self-government is absurd and harmful.

Under duress, the council adopted a motion stating that "cultural self-government of the Jewish national minority is by unanimous vote liquidated."³² The text of the document was a crude example of self-flagellation by the council, which had been elected just a few days before the annexation.³³ A special body, Commission for the Liquidation of Jewish Associations and Organizations, promptly oversaw the liquidation of Jewish fraternities and other cultural institutions.³⁴

The general process of Sovietization was similar in all three Baltic states. Control over the "trade monopolies" was entrusted to local nationalization councils. These councils were supposed to make sure that businesses complied with the "actual needs of the working population" in order to stamp out speculation and potential acts of sabotage. No bias can be detected in the appointment of commissars: the Jew M. Korobov was

³⁰ *Põhja Kodu*, June 26, 1940; *Narva Tööline*, August 9, 1940.

³¹ This deliberate display of loyalty did not produce the desired effect: the new authorities eventually arrested four out of five Jewish cosigners.

³² Protocol no. 1 of the first meeting of the fifth Cultural Council of the Jewish National Minority, ERA, 1107/1/214, 2.

³³ *Riigi Teataja*, December 9, 1940.

³⁴ Protocols and correspondence of the Commission for the Liquidation of Jewish Associations and Organizations, ERA, 1107/1/214, 2.

dispatched to the Õunapuu Company; an Estonian and a Russian, respectively, to the stores of Israel Berson and K. Rosenberg.³⁵

On November 1, 1940, a law mandating nationalization of real estate came into effect.³⁶ Dov Levin has maintained that nationalization affected only a negligible part of the Jewish community.³⁷ To be sure, the official lists of expropriated businesses published in *Riigi Teataja* (Government Gazette) superimpose exactly this conclusion. According to this particular source, only three houses and one commercial enterprise belonging to Jews had been nationalized in Narva between June 1940 and July 1941.³⁸ The actual extent of nationalization can be surmised from the police investigation files. The NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) had registered at least five houses, five stores, and three workshops belonging to Narva Jews that became subject to expropriation. Even this data is incomplete, however, since the case files are available for nine out of twenty Jews who were eventually deported from Narva.³⁹

What happened to the Jews whose businesses had been nationalized? As a means of control, new regulations obliged that from then on craftsmen join in production cooperatives (artels).⁴⁰ In Narva, Jews worked in a cap-making cooperative, in a sewing workshop, in a consumers' cooperative, and in the Narva produce association, among others. The former owner of a two-story house and ready-made clothing store, Israel Berson, ended up working as an unskilled laborer at the Krenholm cotton mill.⁴¹ That said, some members of the Jewish community found themselves among the few who benefited from the establishment of Soviet power.⁴² This was particularly true for people with working class backgrounds.⁴³

Jews moved into administrative positions in such institutions as the Cultural Activities Office (Kultorg) or the Municipal Foodstuffs Supply Agency (Gorpishchetorg). A. Mendelev served in the housing commis-

³⁵ *Narva Tööline*, August 14, 1940.

³⁶ *Riigi Teataja*, November 1, 1940, and June 11, 1941.

³⁷ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 274.

³⁸ *Riigi Teataja*, March 11 and 17, 1941.

³⁹ NKVD investigation and registration files in the Estonian Branch National Archives (hereafter: ERAF), Dvoira Slavitskaia, 130/1/9626; David Rosenberg, 130/1/6940; Israel Gruns, 130/1/4636; Israel Berson, 130/1/555; Fruma Fienberg, 2-M/O/1/27; David Rosenberg, 2-M/O/1/261; Vera Gruns, 2-M/O/1/173; Vaike Dina Goldov, 2-M/O/1/78; Israel Berson, 2-M/O/1/165.

⁴⁰ Żbikowski, "Żydzi polscy pod okupacja sowiecka," 60.

⁴¹ ERAF, 130/1/555, 3–4.

⁴² Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 299.

⁴³ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 274.

sion of Narva City Council, while several other male Jews were admitted to the Military College.⁴⁴ Racial discrimination was stamped out by legal means; “instigation of national hatred” could lead up to five years in jail. Jews in Estonia, like in eastern Poland and other Soviet-occupied territories, were commonly given positions in the middle levels of administration.⁴⁵ Yet some individuals also secured important posts in the upper echelons, among them veterans of the Spanish Civil War Aaron Taub and Victor Feigin. The latter had been an active member of the communist underground and was subsequently appointed head of Tallinn Prison.⁴⁶

That was the exact point in time when negative sentiments vis-à-vis Jews began growing among not only native Estonians but also ethnic Russians (so-called White émigrés constituted a significant portion of the urban Russian population). The number of Jewish bureaucrats or party functionaries in positions of authority grew mainly on account of recent arrivals from the Soviet Union. According to the German Security Service, all the people’s commissars of industry, as well as the top representatives of the NKVD, newspaper editors, and the heads of cultural institutions were Jews—however exaggerated these statistics may have been. Likewise, in a number of nationalized enterprises the Soviet regime reportedly continued employing former Jewish owners or appointed Russian-born Jews as directors, regardless of their qualifications.⁴⁷

The question is whether this post-facto narrative settled deeply in the minds of ordinary Estonians. Even if it did, the reaction was not always one of hatred or rage, but rather disdain. To begin with, documented encounters between Estonians and Jews during the year of Soviet occupation are few and far between. Here is one that describes events of June 21, 1940, in Tartu. A Jewish youth ordered an older Estonian farmer to remove his hat during the performance of “The Internationale” at a public gathering. Following a rather comic exchange, the Estonian eventually refused to obey. When leaving the scene, the Jewish teenager threatened

⁴⁴ Unnumbered records on nationalization, ERA, 2536/1/1618; “Narva” in: *Pinkas ha-kehilot. Entsiklopediya shel ha-yishuvim le-min hivasdam ve-ad le-aher shoat milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniya: Latvia and Estonia* [Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities: Latvia and Estonia], ed. Dov Levin (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 363.

⁴⁵ Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 299; Żbikowski, “Żydzi polscy pod okupacją sowiecką,” 59, 66.

⁴⁶ Levin, “Estonian Jews,” 277; Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, 46, 336f.

⁴⁷ Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 319, 422–23.

to inform on his Estonian interlocutor as a “saboteur.” As for the Estonian public, “people around were laughing, jokes kept coming.”⁴⁸

The majority of Estonians in Narva did not buy into Soviet propaganda, which nevertheless had a limited effect on the local Russians, who predominantly settled on the right bank of Narva River (i.e., the territory ceded to Estonia under the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920) and who constituted about one-third of the city’s total population of 24,500. Whatever their ideological allegiances, many Jews sincerely joined the new structures. Young people and socialists of various stripes in particular saw in the communist order a chance to realize at least some of their ideals. Yet it was obviously an exaggeration when the Narva Security Police argued in its annual report for the period from summer 1941 through June 1, 1942, that the Jews (along with the Russians) had a pronounced influence over the Communist Party. Jewish influence was “predominant,” the police maintained while conceding that “concrete statistical data are unavailable.”⁴⁹ Just how baseless this claim was is possible to ascertain by considering the Communist Party statistics. At the end of 1940, Narva’s party organization boasted 117 members: fifty-six full members and sixty-one candidates, none of them Jewish. 64 percent of the local communists were Russians and 30 percent Estonians, plus two Germans and one Pole.⁵⁰ At a later point Lev Zagorie, a prominent member of the Komsomol (communist youth wing) in Narva, became a candidate member of the party.⁵¹

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the exact proportion of Jews in each subdivision of the NKVD (i.e., the local police, the security police, and prison staff) or in the Prosecutor’s Office and courts. The same concerns composite figures for the Soviet administration in Estonia as a whole. Such figures are, however, available for the city of Narva. Thus, as of early summer 1941, the total number of people working for the regime in Narva was 3,424. By ethnicity, 1,311 (38.4 percent) were Russian, 903 (26.4 percent) Estonian, and 1,121 (32.2 percent) of “unknown” ethnicity. Of nearly three and a half thousand Soviet bureaucrats in Narva fifty-five were Jewish (1.6 percent) and thirty-six (1 percent) were of other national-

⁴⁸ Tartumaa Omakaitse [auxiliary police], overview of activities through the end of 1941, ERA, R-358/1/17.

⁴⁹ Annual report of the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, ERA, R-59/1/17, 17, 40.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the First Narva Communist Party Conference, January 26, 1941, ERAF, 1/1/9, 24.

⁵¹ List of NKVD employees wanted by the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, ERA, R-59/1/32, 368.

ity.⁵² Generally, the proportion of Estonian Jews in the Soviet apparatus fluctuated between 1 and 4 percent, regardless of which statistics one takes as a basis. One author, for example, calculated how many Jewish members of academic associations at the University of Tartu were in the NKVD, Communist Party, or Soviet paramilitary units. Of the 373 members of two Jewish fraternities, a sorority, and an academic association, only nine collaborated with the Soviets, that is, 2.4 percent of the total.⁵³

As previously mentioned, the most active Jews were to be found at the lower levels of power. For example, Lev Zagorie and A. Krigman (Kriegmann) were leaders of the Pioneer youth organization of Narva secondary school no. 3 and no. 5 respectively. I. Shapiro and A. Zmicherevsky ran the wall newspaper published by the trade union's political-literary study group; Shapiro simultaneously served as chairman of the local MOPR committee (International Workers Aid). In connection with International Women's Day, Shore Ester Berson was elected leader of the women's activist group (*aktiv*) of the Narva trade union.⁵⁴ The most active political figure among the Narva Jews was the abovementioned Zagorie. In October 1940, Zagorie was elected to the board of the Komsomol organization for secondary school no. 1, and by December he was already deputy secretary and simultaneously Komsomol leader of the Socialist Trade School.⁵⁵ A member of one of the hastily assembled Soviet shock battalions (*istrebitel'nye bataliony*), Zagorie's name figured prominently on the list of people wanted by the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police.⁵⁶ The police failed to capture Zagorie alive as he died in battle.⁵⁷

Unlike in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania, only a few Jews were directly associated with the Soviet terror in Estonia. The most frequently cited name was that of Idel Jakobson. Popular history recounts that Jakobson arrived from Latvia shortly after the war of national liberation with

⁵² Annual report of the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, ERA, R-59/1/17, 86 (the mathematical inaccuracies are in original document).

⁵³ Toomas Hiio, "Jewish Students and Jewish Student Organizations at the University of Tartu," in *Tartu University Museum: Annual Report, 1998*, ed. Ken Kalling (Tartu University Museum, 1999), 168.

⁵⁴ *Narva Tööline*, October 2 and 28, 1940; March 6, April 29, and May 22, 1941.

⁵⁵ *Narva Tööline*, October 9 and December 11, 1940.

⁵⁶ List of NKVD employees wanted by the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, ERA, R-59/1/32, 368.

⁵⁷ Interview with Bella Shapiro, Tallinn, June 26, 1994. See also a personal letter of Zagorie from March 2, 1941, and his death certificate from August 31, 1942, available online at: http://eja.pri.ee/history/kaks_zagorje_en.html (accessed June 1, 2015).

the sole purpose of overthrowing the legitimate Estonian government. A member of the underground Communist Party of Estonia, Jakobson was arrested in 1931 and sentenced to thirteen years of hard labor, but was granted amnesty in 1938 and subsequently deported to Latvia. Shortly after Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, Jakobson returned to Tallinn, where in September 1940 he was appointed deputy chief of the NKVD investigation department—the highest position in the Soviet Security Police a local Jew had ever held. In the summer of the following year, Jakobson left for Russia.⁵⁸ A few more Jewish names were occasionally mentioned. One of them—Tallinn businessman and communist Leonid Eisenstadt—helped to establish contacts between a handful of underground communists within Estonia and their exiled comrades abroad.⁵⁹ According to an apocryphal story, it was Aaron Gutkin, the son of a textile wholesaler in Tallinn, who tore down the Estonian flag from the Long Hermann tower—a symbol of Estonia's statehood.⁶⁰

There is no avoiding the question as to whether the Jews actually welcomed the Soviet troops and if they joined en masse actions designed to strengthen the new regime. Such a notion prevailed for a long time in Polish historiography, for example.⁶¹ The available sources indicate otherwise. To begin with, Estonia's policy toward ethnic minorities until 1940 could hardly provoke such a reaction. There is no credible evidence that the local Jewish population was disloyal to the Estonian state. Regarding the acceptance of Soviet power by many a Jew simply as a reaction to what was happening in Nazi Germany is equally incorrect. Detailed information about anti-Jewish violence in the Third Reich was not forthcoming. At that, Jews refused to believe that anything of that sort could ever replay on Estonian soil. Ordinary people could be forgiven for hoping for the best while even someone of Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky's status in a private conversation in Tallinn answered a question about the danger of fascism in the negative: "Common sense tells me there won't be war."⁶² Still, some of the Jews who cheered the arrival of Soviet troops were doing more than just making the best of a bad situation. It is by no

⁵⁸ *Eesti Ohvitserid ja Sõjandustegelased* [Estonian officers and military figures], ed. Mati Õun (Tallinn: Sentinel, 2002), 20.

⁵⁹ Olaf Kuuli, *Sotsialistid ja kommunistid Eestis 1917–1991* [Socialists and communists in Estonia, 1917–1991] (Tallinn: self-published, 1999), 64–65.

⁶⁰ Robert Raid, *When the Soviets Came...* vol. 1 (Cardiff, New York: Boreas Publishing House, 1985), 105, 111, 161.

⁶¹ Żbikowski, "Żydzi polscy pod okupacją sowiecką," 55, 62.

⁶² Interview with Dubin.

means possible to characterize the reaction of many Jews to the Soviet takeover as restrained. In my opinion, the collective Jewish reaction can be most accurately described as active concern. Professional discrimination in independent Estonia counted among their key discontents. The very idea of a *career* had been an abstraction for Jews in Estonia. Evidently, news of the substantial role that Jews played in the Soviet administration had reached Estonia. Following annexation, an imposition of equality in employment was to be expected; this was one promise that stayed true.

With the removal of anti-Jewish restrictions by the new Estonian SSR, many Jews availed themselves of new opportunities. Equally predictable was the negative reaction this provoked among the majority population. It was not so much the fact of “collaboration” that may have irritated ethnic Estonians, but rather the sudden appearance of Jews in leading positions: unprecedentedly, in the twinkling of an eye, Jews came to occupy a number of posts. Jews became visible at once.

A cozy relationship with the Soviet authorities—as it appeared to outsiders—was just one side to the story. From the early days of the occupation, Jews in Narva and throughout Estonia became victim to Soviet terror. Some members of the local Zionist organization and some citizens of Mandatory Palestine who happened to be in town at the time were immediately arrested and interrogated.⁶³ The overwhelming majority of Jews suffered from the communist regime in one way or another, including the mass deportation of June 14, 1941, which came as a shock to the entire country.

Awareness of Jews as victims of Soviet terror became subdued during the subsequent Nazi occupation. The German occupation authorities prohibited publication of the names of deported Jews.⁶⁴ In any event, the chief of the German Security Police in Estonia stated in October 1941 that “[t]he number of Jews in the deportations carried out by the Russians is impossible to establish. As has been reported so far, the Jewry was barely affected.”⁶⁵ In fact, Jews constituted a significant share of the deportees, 439 out of the total of 10,157. Put in perspective, 10 percent of the entire Jewish population of Estonia was exiled on a single day in June 1941.

⁶³ “Narva,” in *Pinkas ha-kehilot*, 363.

⁶⁴ *Küüditatud 1941* [The deported, 1941], ed. Velo Salo (Brampton, Ont.: Maarjamaa, 1993), 7.

⁶⁵ *Die “Ereignismeldungen UdSSR” 1941: Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion*, ed. Klaus M. Mallmann (Darmstadt: WBG, 2011), 672.

Thus, proportionately Jews suffered ten times more than Estonians.⁶⁶ The majority of Jews (exact numbers cannot be established) who arrived in Estonia from Austria and Germany in the face of Nazi oppression, but who the Soviets regarded as “German spies,” “saboteurs,” and the like, also fell victim to repression.⁶⁷ According to statistics compiled by the Estonian Security Police, during the year of Soviet occupation 211 people in Narva were arrested, 2 killed, and 458 deported.⁶⁸ Although Jews who held foreign passports were unscathed by the June 1941 deportation, they rightly perceived it as a warning. As soon as Kurt and Edith Sekules learned that the Itskovitch family (Jewish businesspeople who had sponsored them to come to Estonia) had been deported, they quickly bought a suitcase for themselves. A week later, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The very next day, in one fell swoop the NKVD arrested all emigrants with German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian passports. About 150 “enemy aliens” were brought to a detention facility at Harku, east of Tallinn. Almost half of them were recent Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. On July 3, a freight train holding the detainees left Estonia for Russia.⁶⁹

Given the relative numbers of Jews deported by the Soviets (439) and murdered by the Nazis (963), one may be tempted to juxtapose them. Naturally, such juxtaposition would be misleading: the Nazis wiped out the Jews within their grasp, whereas the Soviets carried out a selective purge. One way or another, out of twenty-two Narva Jews who had been arrested by the Soviets (12.2 percent of the city’s Jewish population) at least ten died in prison or in exile (incomplete figures show that four eventually returned to Estonia).

In 90 percent of the cases, Jews were arrested under Article 35 of the Penal Code as “socially dangerous elements.” “Living on income not derived from labor, or by the exploitation of hired labor” was deemed a crime. Almost everyone who engaged in trade or business, or who rented out apartments or even a room, thus became a potential target. Selling on credit, by the same token, was pronounced “extortion of the highest prices from the buyers.”⁷⁰ Needless to say, Soviet law recognized no such thing

⁶⁶ *Küüditatud 1941*, 7.

⁶⁷ Oskar Angelus, “Die Russifizierung Estlands,” *Acta Baltica* 7 (1967): 98.

⁶⁸ Annual report of the Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, ERA, R-59/1/17, 20.

⁶⁹ Edith Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis, Exile and Siberia* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), 68–72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40

as a presumption of innocence. Interrogation, indictment, and sentencing were carried out directly in the places of confinement throughout 1941 and even 1942. Under pressure, not excluding torture, almost everyone “fully admitted his/her guilt.” Examples to the contrary were extremely rare. David Rosenberg denied any wrongdoing by arguing that private trade and hired labor had not been crimes in the Estonian Republic.⁷¹

Individuals convicted under Article 35 routinely received five years of forced labor. Membership in political organizations or supporting them financially fell under Article 58, “counterrevolutionary crimes.” Pinchas Katz, leader of the Revisionist Zionists in Estonia, received the death penalty.⁷² Sometimes matters went to absurd lengths. Narva businessman Israel Berson admitted under interrogation that he contributed five to ten crowns a year to *Kaitseliit* (a volunteer military organization) and *Isamaaliit* (the only official political party allowed to exist after the 1934 attempted coup). The indictment stated that, inasmuch as the basic aim of these organizations was to suppress the revolutionary movement, Berson should receive the “highest measure of social defense,” that is, death by shooting. Before he could be convicted and his sentence carried out, the defendant died of heart attack.⁷³

Returning to the issue of nationalization, real estate and means of production belonging to anyone arrested on the basis of Article 35 were subject to confiscation before trial. Taking into account the percentage of Jews condemned under this particular article, and bearing in mind that a large proportion of the Estonians and Russians arrested were charged with political crimes (many of the latter were apprehended by default as *émigrés*), one comes to the inevitable conclusion that it was in fact the Jews who suffered the most from Soviet nationalization—more than ten times the average for the population as a whole.

Escaping From the Nazis

The large-scale Soviet deportation took place on June 14, 1941; seven days later the Second World War began in earnest for the Soviet Union. On June 28, the government adopted a plan for the evacuation of people

⁷¹ NKVD interrogation of David Rosenberg, February 18, 1942, ERAF, 130/1/6940, 9.

⁷² Levin, “Estonian Jews,” 284.

⁷³ NKVD interrogation of Israel Berson, November 11, 1941; guilty verdict, January 19, 1942, ERAF, 130/1/555, 9–10, 13–16.

and factory equipment from Estonia. The VIII Army Command, which had jurisdiction over Estonia, helped chart the routes and means of the evacuation. When it came to evacuee categories, the evacuation committee prioritized technical personnel of key factories, followed by women, children, the sick and disabled, and people over the age of fifty. In reality, party and state leaders, together with their families, were the first to be evacuated. To board a ship bound for Kronstadt or Leningrad, one required official permission for evacuation, which hampered the rescue operation. At the most critical time, the middle of August, one could still see Jews lining up in Tallinn for these permissions. The majority of young people decided to leave for Russia, even though they felt apprehensive toward Soviet power. Among them were real estate owners, Zionists, and members of the Bund.⁷⁴

Insomuch as the German forces only captured continental Estonia by August, the time factor was less decisive for local Jews than it was for their coreligionists fleeing Latvia.⁷⁵ In Valga, on the border with Latvia, Jewish families were on the move as early as June 30. The city physician, as well as other Jewish doctors, left Valga for Pskov. A string of yellow Riga buses carrying Jewish refugees from Latvia passed through the area between July 1 and 7.⁷⁶ A few days later many of the Riga Jews were seen passing through Narva on their way to Russia. Narva Jews started leaving the city by rail in organized groups as early as the beginning of July.⁷⁷ Most of them had cleared the city by July 17. Some Jews, however, were only evacuated from Narva in August: Veterinarian David Burmistrovich at the last moment managed to join a fire brigade that left the city on August 16.⁷⁸ With similar success the majority of Tartu and Viljandi Jews also managed to flee (Viljandi was one of those few places where officials made a conscious effort to help Jews escape). Not everyone was so lucky, however. Sometime in mid-July, a train with the evacuated Tallinn Jews was hit by a German warplane at Vaivara railway station not far from the Russian border; numerous passengers were killed or wounded.⁷⁹ Of the total number of evacuees from Estonia, about 65,000, Jews accounted for approximately 3,000.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 278–80.

⁷⁵ Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation," 97.

⁷⁶ Valgamaa Omakaitse, overview of activities though August 1, 1942, ERA, R-358/1/18.

⁷⁷ Interview with Irina Ovechkina, Tallinn, January 26, 1995.

⁷⁸ Narva prefecture of the Estonian Security Police, list of communist activists who had fled from the first police precinct, January 22, 1942, ERA, R-59/1/65.

⁷⁹ Virumaa Omakaitse, overview of activities though August 1, 1942, ERA, R-358/1/24.

⁸⁰ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 280–83.

By a decree of the Soviet government from June 24, 1941, local Communist Party committees and the military commissariats began assembling twenty-five shock battalions in Estonia. Prospective rank-and-file were subject to military mobilization. In addition, authorities called upon volunteers among ex-servicemen, administrative personnel, and members of trade unions, the Communist Party, and Komsomol. The shock battalions performed auxiliary functions such guarding plants and factories, yet they also engaged in rearguard combat with units of the Wehrmacht and anti-communist partisans. During the retreat from Estonia these battalions put into effect a "scorched earth" policy. Total membership in the shock battalions reached 9,000, including some 120 Jews (ca. 1.1%).⁸¹ During the subsequent Nazi occupation, authorities went to great lengths to show that a disproportionate number of Jews had served in the shock battalions. Even though nearly all commanding positions were filled by Soviet officers of Russian origin, wartime propaganda emphasized that between July 19 and August 24 the supreme command of the Estonian shock battalions was in the hands of Mikhail Pasternak, a Russian Jewish officer.⁸²

Dozens of newly mobilized Jews fought in the ranks of the XXII Estonian Territorial Corps. Jewish soldiers frequently suffered from antisemitism, so that they often feared their "brothers in arms" as much as the enemy. In line with a decision from December 19, 1941, the territorial corps was reorganized into an Estonian infantry corps, officially designated as the VIII Corps. Jews who served in the reconstituted corps mainly came from Tallinn, Tartu, and Narva, many of whom had previously fought within the shock battalions ranks. As of June 1944, when the Soviet military campaign to reconquer Estonia was underway, about two hundred Jews were still serving in the Estonian infantry corps, somewhat under 1 percent of the total. Twenty-six Jewish servicemen held the rank of sergeant, and twenty-three were officers.⁸³

By the fall of 1941 fewer than 1,000 Jews remained in Nazi-occupied Estonia. Those who decided to stay put did so for a number of reasons. Many of these Jews were inadequately informed about the extent of persecution in Nazi Germany and the occupied countries. In the period leading up to the entrance of the Soviet Union into the war, readers of the

⁸¹ Ibid., 276–77.

⁸² *Eesti rahva kannatuste aasta* [The year of suffering for the Estonian people], publication of the Estonian Self-Government (Tallinn: Eesti Kirjastus, 1943), 145, 151–53, 162.

⁸³ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 278, 288–92. See also Mikhail Girshovich, "Otzvuk voiny" [Echo of war], *Molodezh Estonii*, December 3, 2004.

Soviet press remained in the dark concerning the latest instances of anti-Jewish violence. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had instilled a false sense of security among the Jews.⁸⁴ A few Jewish immigrants from Germany and the occupied European countries who had come to Estonia were perhaps more alert to the potential danger.⁸⁵ Although the Soviet mass media refrained from commenting on anti-Jewish crimes in the Third Reich during the twenty-two months that the Nazi-Soviet agreement held, a segment of the Jewish population had access to credible information all the same. Regardless, the Soviet press was anything but trustworthy even before the August 1939 pact. Many Jews reacted incredulously to information coming from Soviet sources, attributing its livid tales to propaganda. Thus, in retrospect, not only the inaccessibility of information but skepticism in evaluating it played a harmful role. This skepticism was undoubtedly an important factor in the decision of quite a few Jews to risk remaining in Estonia under the Nazi occupation.⁸⁶

Another significant factor was the common perception of the Germans as a nation of civilized people devoted to order. This stereotype did not relate well to the crimes allegedly committed by the very same Germans. The older generation was especially disinclined to trust reports about Nazi brutality toward the Jews. They were still in living memory of the German occupation during the First World War.⁸⁷ Indeed, Jewish life in Narva prior to the German departure in November 1918 had been largely uninterrupted, until after the arrival of the Bolsheviks.⁸⁸ "I know the Germans, and they won't do me any harm," declared a fifty-one-year-old Jewish resident of Narva, Leib Grinberg, in response to attempts to persuade him to escape.⁸⁹ Moreover, those Jews who had suffered under the Soviet regime, whose relatives had been deported, or whose property had been nationalized, were all the more unlikely to trust the Soviets. Some believed that with the German arrival conditions would only improve.⁹⁰ The elderly Haim Moshe Hatzkelevich was left behind by his family to "guard the house." This was in tune with a common desire by older people not to leave their native soil and die peaceably in their own homes.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation," 83.

⁸⁵ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 10.

⁸⁶ Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation," 87, 90.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *Evreiskaia molodaia mysl* (Reval), June 28, 1919.

⁸⁹ Levin, "Estonian Jews," 280.

⁹⁰ Altshuler, "Escape and Evacuation," 90.

⁹¹ Interview with Shapiro.

The pull factor was also missing: Jews were aware of poor living conditions in the Soviet Union. The following short conversation took place on a street in Tallinn some three weeks before the Germans captured the city. Upon the question of whether he wanted to go to Russia, Rachmiel Shadsunsky told his Estonian friend that there was not much there; his father wrote to him from Russia that the people there were starving.⁹² Religious concerns also played a role. Observant Jews did not want to leave without their spiritual leader, Abe Gomer, supreme rabbi of Estonia since 1927. Gomer never left Tallinn, and was subsequently murdered.⁹³

To sum up the Jewish experience during the Soviet occupation of Estonia: while the new authorities lifted certain legal and social restrictions, the Jews suffered disproportionately from Stalinist terror. Nevertheless, a common perception of a special relationship between the Jews and the Soviet regime made some Estonians seek a rational explanation to the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” subsequently carried out by the Nazis.

⁹² Estonian Security Police, interrogation of Rachmiel Shadsunsky, September 5, 1941 ERA, R-64/4/913.

⁹³ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 235.

CHAPTER 4

Accidentally Jewish: Helmut Weiss and the (Il)logic of Political Violence in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia

An authoritarian state such as the Soviet Union did not tolerate volunteer organizations of any kind. This applies to religious or ethnic-based associations as well, making it rather difficult to speak of the “Jewish community” in the Estonian SSR. There were Jews living in postwar Estonia but no identifiable, homogenous Jewish community. A majority of Jews who had been evacuated from Estonia in the summer of 1940 returned after the war. Jews from other parts of the Soviet Union followed, attracted by a more liberal environment and markedly lower levels of antisemitism in Estonia than that they were used to. Some of them narrowly escaped the Nazis, others barely survived the Soviet ordeal. Still few others experienced both Nazi and Soviet terror. Among them was my paternal grandfather, Helmut Weiss. In fact, his identity was exclusively based on ideology. Had not it been for the Nazis, he would have preferred to forget about his Jewish ancestry. Persecuted by Hitler's regime in Germany as both dangerous communist and unworthy Jew, he failed to find in Stalin's Russia the social utopia he had believed in.

Once he legally crossed the border into the Soviet Union in December 1934, he could no longer exercise free will. Eventually coming to Estonia in 1958 was not really a choice either. He simply had nowhere else to turn after having spent nineteen years in the Gulag. This chapter traces Helmut Weiss's life and career, crushed by the two bloodiest regimes in the twentieth century. Effectively, I probe the following three questions: what issues arise from Weiss's double victimization by the Nazi and Soviet regimes; what historians can learn about the respective systems of institutionalized terror from this particular case; and finally, to what extent Weiss's experience is archetypal when it comes to political mass vio-

lence. Essentially, I attempt a political history of an individual. As I paint him in this chapter, Helmut Weiss comes across perhaps less a man of flesh and blood than a tragic figure swept along by an ideological whirlwind. Hence I begin by situating his case in the existing scholarship on Soviet and Nazi terror.

Double Victimization: German Communists and the 1930s Purges in the Comintern

Helmut Weiss belonged to a group of idealistic, ideological German youths who saw the Bolshevik experiment as a beacon of hope for humanity, who made a conscious choice to move to the Soviet Union in the 1930s fleeing Nazi persecution at home, and who fell victim to Stalin's Great Terror. In order to better understand the mechanisms of political violence, it may be helpful to think in terms of groups targeted by both Nazi and Soviet regimes. One such group comprised Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, particularly after 1938. Yet the total number of refugees barely exceeded several thousand, mainly due to restrictions on emigration. Furthermore, most of them traveled to the then independent Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, rather than to Soviet Russia. Some of those refugees were arrested during the Soviet mass deportation of June 1941.¹

A much more prominent group was made up of German communists or German communist sympathizers. Many of the foreign-born communists who moved to the Soviet Union in the 1930s had previously been arrested, interrogated, and incarcerated by police in their home countries. The predominant explanation of their victimization by Stalinist regime can be described as functionalist. By having immigrated to the Soviet Union, foreign communists, including German nationals, ceased to be part of an underground movement that provided the sense of common purpose. This led to a fracturing of the national sections of the Comintern, an undoing of internal cohesiveness, and eventually score-settling, typically by means of denunciation. The ultimate cause of their demise, however, was the war scare, xenophobia, and ill-conceived Stalinist policies fuelling suspicion of foreign communists. Ironically, the arrest (and eventual release) of any given German communist by the Gestapo prior to emigrating to the Soviet Union worked against him or her in the eyes of Soviet officials. Those foreign communists who had acquired membership in the

¹ Cf. Sekules, *Surviving the Nazis*.

Soviet Communist Party were viewed with an even greater suspicion. Communist Party suspicion of foreigners intensified in 1935. The vigilance campaign prompted a political review of all foreign communists in the Soviet Union a year later.² What happened next is well-known: the first show trial in Moscow in August 1936; the appointment of Nikolai Ezhov as new head of the NKVD in September 1936; and the growing hysteria culminating in an unprecedented campaign of political violence typically referred to as the Great Terror, which lasted roughly from June 1937 until December 1938. A majority of German communist victims were caught up in the Stalinist terror during that period.

A string of decrees from August 1936 onward proved ominous for political émigrés from Germany. Remarkably, among the sixteen defendants who stood the first Moscow show trial that month, five were German-Jewish émigrés. In the wake of the trial, the Central Committee instructed local party cells to increase vigilance and to better identify the enemy within: Supporters of Leo Trotsky and Grigory Zinoviev were supposedly plotting to assassinate Stalin and other members of the Politburo. In his January 1937 letter to Stalin, the Secretary of the Saratov Region Communist Party singled out as “Trotskyites” German émigrés who had gone through Nazi concentration camps. On July 20, 1937, the Politburo ordered the NKVD to arrest all ethnic Germans working in defense industries. Five days later the NKVD launched the operation against the German nationals suspected of espionage against the USSR, which was effectively extended to all Germans regardless of their citizenship. Finally, the notorious order No. 00447 of July 30, 1937, which lashed out against “former kulaks, criminals, and anti-Soviet elements,” specifically targeted “members of fascist, terrorist, and spy-sabotage counterrevolutionary groups.” The operation was to be completed within four months.³

In order to establish, at least approximately, the percentage of German communists swept up in the Great Terror, a brief overview of German immigration to Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s is due. On the eve of the Nazi takeover, close to 20,000 foreign workers and professionals

² William J. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2001), 4–5. For alternative explanations see Kevin McDermott, “Stalinist Terror in the Comintern: New Perspectives,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 1 (January 1995): 122–26.

³ Oleg Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii: Nemetskie emigranty v SSSR v 30-e gody* [From illusion to tragedy: German émigrés in the USSR in the 1930s] (Moscow: Neues Leben, 1997), 98–105; Carola Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung: Deutsche Emigranten im sowjetischen Exil 1933 bis 1945* (Münster: LIT, 1996), 96–98, 105.

(40,000 together with family members) resided in the Soviet Union. About 11,000 (17,000) of economic émigrés were German, with 95 percent of them arriving between 1930 and 1932. Political emigration from Germany began in earnest in 1933. In that year 688 Germans obtained status of a political émigré. In 1934 and 1935, some 2,045 Germans received political asylum in the Soviet Union. The following year, however, only seventy-seven political émigrés from Nazi Germany were allowed into the country. All but one indicated threat of imprisonment as the reason for emigration. The numbers of foreign arrivals would have been much higher had it not been for restriction on immigration imposed in the Soviet Union in the wake of Sergei Kirov's assassination. While continuously publicizing its support for the "antifascists," the Soviet authorities effectively turned the inflow of political émigrés into a trickle. According to Oleg Dal, among the main reasons were general suspicion of immigrants and their possible collaboration with the Gestapo; the eagerness to use foreign communists to foment revolutions abroad; limited resources to accommodate new arrivals; and the need to maintain good diplomatic relations with Germany in order to secure the technologies and equipment for industrialization. As of January 1937, an estimated 4,000 German communists lived in the Soviet Union.⁴

As political refugees from Germany came streaming in, economic émigrés became increasingly dissatisfied with working conditions in the Soviet Union. Many of them opted for remigration. The onset of forced collectivization made some 4,500 German Mennonites congregate in Moscow and apply for exit visas in the fall of 1929. If this was a sign of things to come, the flight from Moscow of a prominent German communist Erich Wollenberg in 1934 sounded the full alarm with the Soviet authorities. Consequently, the distinction between economic and political émigrés became hazier. Instead of extending Soviet influence in the border regions—as was originally envisaged—ethnic minorities appeared to undermine the national security of the Socialist State. Soviet xenophobia and the omnipresent fear of foreign encirclement prepared the ground for comprehensive ethnic cleansing of the borderlands beginning in 1935, as Terry Martin has convincingly argued.⁵

In the period following Hitler's ascent to power, the Comintern stipulated that any potential émigré should secure the permission of the Ger-

⁴ Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii*, 9–14, 70–77.

⁵ Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (December 1998): 813–61.

man Communist Party prior to arrival in the Soviet Union. Otherwise, the arrivals were blamed for “avoiding the difficulties of the party work in the conditions of the increasing fascist and police terror, being effectively party deserters.” Party oversight should also ensure that no hostile elements such as members of the Social Democratic Party or the Nazi Party among the German workers could steal into Soviet factories. Simultaneously, in order to prevent foreign nationals from returning home, they were pressured to take up Soviet citizenship and/or transfer to the Soviet Communist Party. Proposed by Wilhelm Florin, Secretary of the Comintern Executive Committee, in July 1932, this policy became commonplace from 1934 onward. During the Great Terror, those foreigners, including Germans, who had failed to get Soviet nationality prior to 1937 risked deportation to their home countries. Regardless, the freshly minted Soviet citizens were in 1937 and 1938 routinely dismissed from their positions on the basis of their ethnicity.⁶

Typical for the Stalinist system as a whole, as William Chase has argued, the Comintern was at the same time an agent, instrument, and victim of mass violence. The conspiratorial logic came to haunt the Comintern. During the 1936 political reviews, the “true” Bolsheviks within the Comintern perpetuated terror by organizing meetings, demanding “vigilance,” denouncing alleged enemies within their ranks, recommending their expulsion from the Party, and occasionally suggesting arrest. As postulated in official documents, the issue at stake was compromised party loyalty and a potential threat to national security.⁷ The German Section of the Comintern was not only the most thoroughly purged—with 70 percent of the members arrested by the spring of 1938—but also the most willing to cooperate with the NKVD, as attested by the Cadres Department staff.⁸ Once again, ethnic Poles, Germans, and Latvians were overrepresented among the Comintern staff apprehended by the NKVD.⁹

The earlier arrests among the German Communist Party members (126 in 1935 and 1936) targeted three categories of alleged offenders: “Trot-

⁶ Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii*, 18, 48, 54–57.

⁷ Ibid., 6–7, 102, 109.

⁸ Alexander Vatin, *Komintern: Ideii, resheniia, sud'by* [Comintern: ideas, decisions, faith] (Moscow: Rossphen, 2009), 354–55, 370. See also his latest book, “*Nu i nechest*”: *Nemetskaia operatsiia NKVD v Moskve i Moskovskoi oblasti 1936–1941 gg.* [What a crap!: The German operation of the NKVD in Moscow and Moscow region, 1936–1941] (Moscow: Rossphen, 2012).

⁹ Mikhail Panteleev, “Repressii v Kominterne (1937–1938),” *Otechestvennaia istoria* 6 (1996): 162.

skyites,” persons incriminated in contacts with the Gestapo and the German Embassy in Moscow, and “other anti-Soviet elements.” The Gestapo label applied to anyone who had previously been released or had escaped from a Nazi concentration camp.¹⁰ According to the twisted logic of the NKVD, since a defendant could not have possibly been released from a German concentration camp without the connivance of the Gestapo, he or she was collaborating with the former agency. During the Great Terror, the “Nazi link” permanently entered the plethora of criminal charges in the NKVD repertoire. In mid-July 1937 the prominent German communist in exile, Walter Ulbricht, drew a parallel between “counterrevolutionary Trotskyism” and the Nazi policies of Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring. Around the same time began circulating a rumor about the alleged meeting between Trotsky and Rudolf Hess arranged through the Comintern.¹¹ In early 1938, the Moscow NKVD uncovered a mythical terrorist organization called Hitlerjugend. The seventy individuals who were arrested as part of the ensuing police operation allegedly spread fascist propaganda and plotted acts of sabotage.¹² The only documented case in which the Nazis played their hand in the Great Terror relates to the decimation of the Red Army top brass in June 1937. Although the evidence is still inconclusive, historians have come to a consensus that Reinhard Heydrich’s Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*) did indeed forge documents framing Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky as a German agent with the purpose of undermining the Soviet military. Whether Stalin actually needed the Nazis’ forgery in order to send Tukhachevsky and eighteen other top military commanders to their death is a different question altogether.¹³

¹⁰ Alexander Vatlin, “Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der Komintern,” in *Terror: Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–1953*, ed. Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 75; Reinhard Müller, “‘Wir kommen alle dran’: Säuberungen unter den deutschen Politemigranten in der Sowjetunion (1934–1938),” in *ibid.*, 144.

¹¹ Vladimir Bobrenev, *Za otsutstviem sostava prestuplenia* [Due to the absence of incriminating evidence] (Moscow: Olimp, 1998), 80–81.

¹² Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 105.

¹³ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 198; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution From Above, 1928–1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 382; Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 53–56; *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939*, ed. Arch J. Getty and Oleg Naumov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 444–49; Simon S. Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 226.

Among the 1,575,000 people who were arrested during the Great Terror, 70,000 claimed German origin. With the number of executions for 1937 and 1938 estimated at 681,692, the death toll among German political émigrés is difficult to establish.¹⁴ According to Alexander Roginsky, out of 4,000 German nationals residing in the Soviet Union, about 800 were arrested in 1937–38; among some 800 individuals who had taken Soviet citizenship, or remained without citizenship, close to one-half.¹⁵ Stéphane Courtois and Jean Louis Panné operate with comparable figures based on statistics produced by the German Communist Party in the 1950s. By analyzing the available data on 561 individuals—or about a half the German victims of terror—they established that 82 of them were executed, 197 died in incarceration, 132 were expelled to Nazi Germany, and 150 survived their long sentences.¹⁶

The expulsion of German communists to Nazi Germany by the Soviet authorities constitutes perhaps the most counterintuitive aspect of political violence. Indeed, perhaps as many as one-third of the victims, not all of them communists, arrested by the NKVD were not executed or imprisoned but handed over to the Gestapo. Significantly, it was the Comintern that paved the way for the deportation of select German communists to Nazi Germany. The forced repatriation of political refugees was framed as part of the campaign against “desertion from the battlefields of class struggle,” including those in Nazi Germany. In December 1935, the Comintern Secretariat condemned the existing practice of recommendations issued on behalf of foreign communists willing to join the Soviet Communist Party. Supposedly, a great many “spies, saboteurs, and class-alien elements” had sneaked into the party ranks. All those individuals automatically entered the “enemies of the people” lists.¹⁷ The decree of March 7, 1936, prescribed expelling the individuals suspected of espionage and disloyalty to the Communist Party to the countries of their origin.¹⁸ Wilhelm Pieck, Secretary General of the Comintern in waiting, es-

¹⁴ Nicolas Werth, “A State against Its People: Violence, Repression, and Terror in the Soviet Union,” in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, ed. Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, and Jean-Louis Margolin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 190.

¹⁵ Wilhelm Mensing, *Von der Ruhr in den GULag: Opfer des Stalinschen Massenterrors aus dem Ruhrgebiet* (Essen: Klartext, 2001), 85–86.

¹⁶ Stéphane Courtois and Jean-Louis Panné, “The Comintern in Action,” in *The Black Book of Communism*, 301.

¹⁷ Vatlin, *Komintern*, 342–45, 354.

¹⁸ Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii*, 79.

timated in August 1938 that anywhere between one-third and two-thirds of all political émigrés would eventually (be forced to) re-emigrate.¹⁹

Initially, the Nazi authorities were not very enthusiastic about the return of German communists. Their hands were literally full after the Gestapo arrested some eleven thousand communists in the wake of the Reichstag fire. In 1934, however, a special agency was already in existence for the purpose of utilizing the experiences of German returnees as part of anti-Bolshevik propaganda. Eventually, this agency came under Anti-Comintern, an umbrella organization established by the Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels in 1933. Through October 1936, the Gestapo processed 1,100 arrivals from the Soviet Union, 70 percent of whom it labeled sympathetic to communism and thus politically unreliable. Jews and persons of mixed blood (*Mischlinge*) among the re-immigrants went straight into concentration camps while the rest spent half a year under police surveillance. Between January 1937 and June 1939 the Gestapo received a further 2,180 persons from the USSR. Roughly one-quarter, or 604 to be precise, of these individuals had previously been arrested by the NKVD. In parallel, from 1938 onward Hitler's regime forced Soviet citizens of Jewish origin to leave the country. Of an estimated 500 to 800 such individuals, some 250 departed by the summer of 1939, though mainly for countries other than the Soviet Union (Soviet authorities did everything possible to prevent their return).²⁰

For the first time, a group of ten prisoners were handed over to the Germans in February 1937—that is, before the Great Terror was instituted. Urged by the German Ambassador in Moscow, Werner von der Schulenberg, in November and December 1937 the Soviet authorities transferred 148 Germans under arrest, and yet another 297 the following year, usually via Poland. The practice of expulsion of German and Austrian refugees to Nazi Germany continued beyond 1938, especially after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. According to estimates, some 350 communists were delivered to the Nazis between November 1939 and

¹⁹ Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 100.

²⁰ Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 120–28. Hermann Göring originally intended to call the new police force the Secret Police Office (*Geheimes Polizeiamt*), but the German abbreviation GPA sounded too much like the Soviet GPU. See William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 270. See also Lorna L. Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern and Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 4 (October 2007): 573–94.

May 1941.²¹ Typically, the NKVD delivered the deportee lists to the German Embassy, which then screened them in accordance with Gestapo guidelines. Although the Embassy was specifically instructed to prevent the entry of Jews into the Third Reich, some of them ended up among the expellees and eventually in sites of Nazi terror such as the Lublin ghetto and Majdanek death camp.²²

Helmut Weiss: The Idea of Class Struggle Betrayed

Helmut Weiss was born in 1913 in Dresden, Germany, to a family of a small Jewish businessman. His father came from Austrian Galicia (present-day Chervonohrad in Ukraine) and his mother from Leipzig. Weiss Senior worked as an accountant while his wife stayed at home with their only son. Despite financial problems, the parents enrolled their son in the King Georg Gymnasium and parallel in a music school. Not untypical for assimilated German Jews, Helmut Weiss rejected his roots, describing his parents later in life as “proletarians with petty bourgeois ideology.”²³ At the age of sixteen he began pondering bigger problems in life: his sympathy for the labor movement made him turn to communism for answers. Despite the objections of his parents, in 1929 he officially left the Jewish congregation and joined the German Communist Youth organization. A year later he became a member of the German Communist Party. He also made his political sympathies known at school. He chose to write his term papers, among other things, on the religious philosophy of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Hegel in the light of Marxism; one of his writings had a

²¹ Courtois and Panné, “The Comintern in Action,” 301–302. Nicolas Werth writes about 570 German communists who were delivered to the Gestapo at Brest-Litovsk in February 1940 (Cf. Werth, “A State Against Its People”, 195). For individual stories of the Germans deported to the Third Reich see Mensing, *Von der Ruhr in den GULag*, 93, 98, 106, 167. Perhaps the best-known among the individuals delivered to the Nazis was Margarete Buber-Neumann, who described her ordeal in her autobiography, *Under Two Dictators: Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1949).

²² Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 133–37. See also Wilhelm Mensing, “Eine ‘Morgengabe’? Die sowjetische Auslieferung deutscher Emigranten an das NS-Regime nach Abschluss des Hitler-Stalin-Pakts,” *Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie* 23 (2011): 37–65.

²³ Weiss was one among the 5,120 Jews who lived in Dresden according to the 1925 Census; by 1933 the number had decreased to 4,397. For the tension between Jewish and Communist identity, see Bettina Völter, *Judentum und Kommunismus: Deutsche Familiengeschichte in drei Generationen* (Leverkusen: Leske + Budrich, 2003).

straightforward title: “War to the Imperialist War!” Simultaneously, he started contributing short stories and sketches to local communist publications. One of his publications featured an aggressive polemic against some of the teachers at King Georg, which resulted in his expulsion from the gymnasium (he was then in the seventh grade). Subsequently, he became even more active in the communist press, publishing under the pennames “Chronos” and “Hans Wendt.” Whatever short employments he had, he ended up indoctrinating his coworkers in communist ideology. Predictably, the fiery teenager found it increasingly difficult to make a steady income; he found his calling as the leader of a communist propaganda unit.²⁴

Weiss’s first encounter with the German police occurred in 1930: he was arrested for participation in an unsanctioned demonstration, spent a few hours under arrest, but was released after having paid the twenty-five Reichsmark fine.²⁵ In order to get his articles published, he had to illegally take them over the border to Czechoslovakia where the editorial board of *Arbeiterstimme*—the communist daily of the Saxon section of the German Communist Party—had relocated. On the way back, he brought banned communist literature. On one occasion he nearly escaped arrest and potential conviction when the German border guard searched his luggage at the crossing. An extra pack of cigarettes and the obvious ignorance of the guards—who took at face value the subtitle of one of the communist-inspired books, *Bauernroman*—saved his life.²⁶

The second time Weiss came into direct contact with the police was in 1933. According to Weiss, police conducted a search of his Dresden apartment on suspicion of his membership in the Communist Party. There are two different versions of this particular encounter. According to the first version, Weiss escaped arrest because the police found no illegal literature, which he had previously hidden in friend’s house.²⁷ According to the second version, the police did discover the literature and threatened Weiss with expulsion unless he stopped his illegal activities.²⁸

²⁴ Wilhelm Mensing, “Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger wird bei Stalin das Schreiben abgewöhnt: Aus dem Leben des Dresdner jüdischen Schriftstellers Helmut Weiss,” *Exil: Forschung, Erkenntnisse, Ergebnisse* 23, no. 2 (2003): 34–35.

²⁵ Helmut Weiss NKVD file, interrogation records, November 21, 1937, State Archives of the Russian Federation (hereafter: GARF), 10035/1/M-23290.

²⁶ Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Small-Town Russia: Childhood Memories of the Final Soviet Decade* (Gainesville, FL: Florida Academic Press, 2010), 15–16.

²⁷ Mensing, “Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger,” 38.

²⁸ Weiss NKVD file, interrogation records, November 21, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

As a Jew and a communist, Weiss had no chance to carry on in Germany. In March 1934, he severed contact with his comrades so as not to endanger their lives. Eventually, Weiss lost all his contacts with the underground German Communist Party. At that point, emigration remained the only option. At the end of November 1934, he received an official reply to his earlier request from the Soviet Embassy in Berlin: he was granted Soviet citizenship. The fear of imminent arrest, his ideological convictions, and his genuine belief that the Soviet Union was a success story made Weiss decide in that instant to move to the state of peasants and workers. Beside ideological affinity, he had maintained literary contacts in the Soviet Union: since 1931 he had published in the Soviet German-language magazine *Sturmschritt*, and in 1933 the Publishing House for National Minorities in Kharkov (the editorial board later relocated to Kiev) printed a Ukrainian translation of one of his novels. On December 8, 1934, he boarded a train in Dresden, passing the border control as a Soviet citizen without any problem. Two days later he arrived in Kharkov, the then capital of the Ukrainian SSR.²⁹

Disappointment arrived quickly: he had difficulty proving his credentials as a member of the German Communist Party. At the same time, as a newly minted Soviet citizen, he was not recognized as a political émigré. Even worse, he immigrated to the Soviet Union without the sanction of the German Communist Party. As a result, he could not claim protection of the International Red Cross or the International Workers Aid (MOPR), had difficulty gaining employment, accommodation, or even foodstuffs. Consequently, he managed to publish just a handful of short stories in 1935 and 1936.³⁰ Upon inquiry from his publisher, in January 1936 the Comintern Cadres Department reported that his documents were currently with the German Section. Weiss failed to secure a recommendation in order to officially transfer from the German to the Soviet Communist Party due to the unverified circumstances of his departure from Nazi Germany.³¹

Finally, he managed to gain employment as a lab assistant in the Kharkov Institute of Metrology, playing piano at the Club of Foreign

²⁹ Ibid. Weiss arrived in Ukraine just one year after the horrendous man-made famine, which killed 120,000 people in Kharkov alone. When recollecting his early years in the Soviet Union, he never ever mentioned the 1932–33 famine.

³⁰ Mensing, "Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger," 39.

³¹ Weiss Comintern file, Comintern Cadres Department to the Commission for the Transfer of Members of the Brotherly Communist Parties, January 23, 1936, Russian State Archives of Social-Political History (hereafter: RGASPI), 17/98/2320.

Workers at night. Soon he married a fellow political émigré, Erna Asta Brandt (a German from Czechoslovakia, 11 years his elder), whom he had met at the Worker's Club.³² Yet he was eager to resume the party work that he had previously pursued in Germany. In April 1935 he approached the German Section of the Comintern in Moscow, suggesting that his fellow German émigrés in Kharkov should get in touch with comrades elsewhere in order to collect data about the realities in Nazi Germany. Unbeknownst to him, Helmut tapped into the Soviet spy-mania, which treated with suspicion any contact of political émigrés with their homeland. Helmut sought to rectify his case through the Cadres Department of the Comintern German Section. Instead, in June 1936 the German party officials refused to recognize his reasons for emigration and recommended against his admission into the Soviet Communist Party. Simultaneously, the NKVD in Kharkov opened an inquiry into his case.³³

H. M. Weiss, born in 1913 in Germany, German, member of the CPG [Communist Party of Germany], arrived in the USSR legally in 1934, without the sanction of the CPG, was not recognized as political refugee. Works as a lab assistant in the Aerometric Lab at the Ukrainian National Research Institute of Metrology, citizen of the USSR, city of Kharkov, 42 Kontorskaia St.

We are investigating Weiss as a fairly suspicious [individual] in view of his counterrevolutionary links to espionage. In 1932, while in Germany, Weiss collaborated with the German magazine *Sturmschritt*, which had been published in Kharkov as the organ of the German Branch [of the Communist Party] and of, by now closed down, literati organization *Pflug* ingrained in kulak-nationalist viewpoint. Along with Weiss, another contributor to the magazine was Kaltoven, who used to come to the USSR from Germany as foreign tourist, suspected of links to the German police.

When working as a part-time correspondent of *Das Neues Dorf* newspaper, Weiss was closely linked to a number of senior employees of the Publishing House for National Minorities (Knorre, Fiestner, etc.) who had been arrested on charges of counter-revolutionary fascist activities.

As the *DND* correspondent, Weiss was especially keen, suspiciously, on going on business trips in the border areas. Weiss is maintaining correspondence with his relatives in Germany. Weiss is the head of the [propaganda] brigade of the German Club and he is being investigated on suspicion of counterrevolutionary nationalist activities.

³² Born in Danzig, in 1923 Brandt joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia where she had moved with her first husband Gustav. The Brandts arrived in the USSR in August 1926, settling in Konstantinovka, Ukraine. Their subsequent request regarding the transfer to the Soviet Communist Party had been rejected. Gustav and Erna Brandt Comintern file, RGASPI, 17/98/10361.

³³ Mensing, "Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger," 40–41; Weiss NKVD interrogation file, German Section of the Comintern to Weiss, May 17, 1935, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

As a lab assistant, Weiss is useless, he is reserved and does not demonstrate any particular zeal at work.

Regard as belonging to Category 1: expulsion [*vydvorit'*].³⁴

Obviously, the NKVD was “building up” the case from thin air, by advancing several rather than one specific charge against Weiss. The reference to his legal status attests to the fact that the NKVD was taking cues from the Comintern Cadres Department. He automatically fell into the category of a suspect because some of his contacts had been arrested on counterrevolutionary charges. The use of the word *fascist* in the inquiry was purely rhetoric; the NKVD might as well have chosen the generic *enemy*. Significantly, as the proposed punishment for his alleged offenses, the NKVD initially suggested expelling Weiss from the Soviet Union.³⁵

In July 1936 Weiss and his wife traveled to Moscow, once again without having previously informed the Comintern (he cited low pay as the main reason for leaving Kharkov.) In Moscow he met the director of a cultural center in Engels, who offered him a position as a music instructor. When he arrived in the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans a few days later, however, his appointment was suddenly cancelled. This is when Weiss learned that the German Section of the Comintern had an issue with him, effectively having blacklisted him. For the same reason, a potential job at the German Service of Radio Moscow also fell through. The only employment Weiss could find upon his return to Moscow was as an accordion player in a jazz orchestra in one of Moscow’s movie theaters. In an attempt to clear his name, on September 5, 1936, he wrote a letter to the German Section of the Comintern. Typically for communists under suspicion, he wondered if it was some sort of misunderstanding: he must have been confused for some other “Weiss.”³⁶

Unbeknown to Weiss, at the exact same time his fellow communist German writers were looking into his “case.” Two months earlier, the organization of German writers in exile launched an internal review of its

³⁴ Weiss NKVD file, Inquiry into the case of H. M. Weiss, June 10, 1936, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

³⁵ This was indeed a surprising proposition, taking into account that Weiss was officially a Soviet citizen. So far, only one case has come to light of a German émigré who had been deported despite his Soviet citizenship. Wilhelm Mensing has speculated that, perhaps, the NKVD did not recognize the fact of Weiss’s naturalization. Communication from Mensing, December 12, 2012.

³⁶ Weiss NKVD file, Weiss to the German Section of the Comintern, September 5, 1936, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

members. Between September 4 and 9, nineteen well-known figures in German political and literary circles attended closed meetings in the editorial office of the *Internationale Literatur* magazine in Moscow. Party activists attacked each other over alleged connections to certain “counter-revolutionaries.” Ernst Ottwalt appears to be the main target of the vicious criticism during the grueling five-day proceedings.³⁷ The name of Helmut Weiss, variously spelled, came out in the bitter exchange between Ernst Ottwalt and Ernst Fabri, with the participation of Gustav von Wangenheim and Emma Dornberger. What they had to say about Weiss and his wife was a mixture of truth and fiction.

The way Fabri and Ottwalt described Weiss created an impression that they were talking about two different people. Fabri portrayed the imaginary Wolf (Helmut?) Weiss as a “piece of filth unsuitable for political work who was senselessly roaming the streets of Moscow.” According to Ottwalt, after a stint at Comintern Radio, Weiss traveled to Leningrad where he was later arrested. Countering Ottwalt, Fabri claimed that after having committed “grave political excesses” in Leningrad, Weiss actually returned to the capital city. In Moscow he reportedly shared a room with an exposed spy and provocateur and was eventually apprehended. Ottwalt slammed this allegation as false, indeed harmful, driving the “proletarian youth” into the hands of class enemies. The common reference point was a manuscript that Weiss had submitted for publication in *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* (the organ of the German Communist Party in exile), unsuccessfully. Fabri insisted that the manuscript was unacceptable, coming from a “morally corrupt” individual. Ottwalt, however, said that the manuscript was not so bad and its author talented.³⁸

The remaining information concerning Helmut Weiss effectively confirmed his own testimony during an NKVD interrogation a year later. Some of the details, especially concerning his wife Erna Brandt, emerged for the first time, however. Dornberger depicted Brandt as a good human being with no “counterrevolutionary” traits. A typist and tailor, Brandt

³⁷ Doris Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat: Deutschsprachige kommunistische Intellektuelle und ihre sozialen Beziehungen (1918–1960)* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012), 302–306. Particularly strong criticism of Ottwalt came from Willi Bredel, who spent a year in Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel concentration camp. Otherwise, occasionally, Ottwalt also resorted to denunciation.

³⁸ Proceedings of the closed party meeting of the German Commission of the Soviet Writers Union, September 7, 1936, RGASPI, 541/01/102b/30–30a. See also *Die Säuberung, Moskau 1936: Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung*, ed. Reinhard Müller (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991).

arrived in Moscow with her young writer of a husband from Kharkov. Obviously, finding a job proved challenging (here Dornberger recalled the piece of advice by Stalin not to change one's job). To help out, she arranged for Brandt to take on sewing jobs for the Comintern people staying at the Lux hotel. Ottwalt explained that Weiss exposed himself by sending out several reports from Nazi Germany while in the communist underground. He related the story of how Weiss had nearly been apprehended carrying illegal literature over the border from Czechoslovakia. The promising young writer had published a few stories in *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (AIZ) but failed to claim his honorarium from Prague. Then, he suddenly received Weiss's letter from Kharkov. Weiss told Ottwalt that he had emigrated without the explicit permission of the German Communist Party. Weiss's case was taken up by the Dresden party cell, of which Ottwalt had reportedly notified his junior comrade. Consequently, Ottwalt discontinued all contacts with Weiss.³⁹

For once, Fabri confirmed Ottwalt's account. He had heard from someone about a comrade who had recently arrived from Germany. That individual had failed to reestablish contact with the German Communist Party or any local affiliates; neither did he succeed at that while in Prague. Apparently he had received a Soviet passport from the Soviet Embassy in Berlin. Wangenheim told another anecdote about Weiss. The Director of the Cultural Center in Engels had promised Weiss a job. However, the couple only spent a few days in the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans, since Weiss's professional qualifications were pronounced not enough. Eventually, someone advised Weiss to approach the Party Control Committee and Karl Radek. The latter helped Weiss secure the position of musician in the Orion movie theater with the 800 Ruble salary.⁴⁰

Returning to the question Weiss had on his mind: was it indeed a case of mistaken identity? For instance, the proceedings of the Comintern Cadres Department of September 1936 (subsequently forwarded to the NKVD) included the names of Ernst Ottwalt and Erich Wendt. A member of the German Communist Party, Wendt worked at the Publishing House

³⁹ Ibid. Both Dornberger and Fabri mistakenly referred to Weiss's wife as "Maria" Brandt. Political émigrés were discouraged from staying in Moscow. Due to a lack of accommodation, Hotel Lux effectively became a permanent residence for many of them. See, for example, Ruth von Mayenburg, *Hotel Lux* (Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1978).

⁴⁰ Proceedings of the closed party meeting of the German Commission of the Soviet Writers Union, September 7, 1936, RGASPI, 541/01/102b/30–30a.

for Foreign Workers.⁴¹ Both were subsequently arrested and sentenced to forced labor, except that Ottwalt died in the Gulag in 1943 while Wendt managed to return to East Germany in 1947 where he later made a successful career.

The Perverse Logic of Political Mass Violence

For the very last time, Helmut Weiss was registered as paying his party membership dues in September 1937.⁴² On November 19, 1937, as usual, Weiss reported for work at the Orion. During the intermission, two men in plain clothes approached him, asking him to follow them. Upon the question as to whether he should take his accordion with him, the men replied that he should not be worried for he would be back in no time.⁴³ He was only able to return 20 years later.

Eight days after his arrest, *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* printed a review of Weiss's book, *Heer im Dunkeln: Geschichten aus Hitlerdeutschland* (Army in the dark: Stories from Hitler's Germany). The book comprised twelve short stories and was published under his penname, Hans Wendt. The book was released by the Publishing House for National Minorities in Kiev in January 1937. It was Weiss's only German-language publication since he arrived in the Soviet Union. The stories in the book were set in Hitler's Germany. At least one of them, "Weg über die Grenze" (Path over the border), was clearly painted after himself. The story described a young communist activist who transported illegal publications over the Czech border. The protagonist oscillated between elation and dejection, was captured by the Gestapo, and eventually died in prison. "Not an informer, but romantic. It's a pity," ended Weiss this particular story.⁴⁴

The focus of the review, however, was on one other story in the book, "Das Werkzeug" (The tool). The review, poignantly titled "Denkmäler für Verräter?" (Monuments to traitors?), blasted the author of the book for "rightist tendencies." The story went as follows. A certain Communist Party official, Franz Schulz, belonged to an underground cell that had been infiltrated by the Gestapo. The Gestapo framed Schulz as if it were

⁴¹ Müller, "'Wir kommen alle dran,'" 140–43.

⁴² Due payments of the German Communist Party members, December 29, 1937, RGASPI, 495/292/94.

⁴³ Weiss-Wendt, *Small-Town Russia*, 17.

⁴⁴ Mensing, "Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger," 41–42.

he who had denounced his comrades. The Gestapo occasionally released him, then again paraded him in front of the inmates in the company of the police officers. Schulz failed to shed off the label of an informer. He attempted, but failed, to commit suicide in his prison cell. A fairly simple story at first glance, Weiss had actually described an extremely complex psychological situation. He emphasized that the story had been painted from facts, and that “Franz Schulz is one of many—an unfortunate tool of Fascism, a victim.”⁴⁵

The author of the review, who signed as Kurt Funk, accused Helmut Weiss/Hans Wendt of “retouching the objective reality.” Weiss purportedly excused the behavior of the person who had been broken by the Gestapo, who stabbed his comrades in the back, and thus rendered service to the “fascist bloodhounds.” Effectively, argued the reviewer, the author of the book had built a monument to the traitor. Funk finished his review ominously, enquiring how come that the Publishing House for National Minorities had released such a harmful book. As for Weiss/Wendt, he suggested his case to be considered by “appropriate authorities,” which in that particular context could only mean the NKVD.⁴⁶

As far as the publishing house in Kiev is concerned, there is no information as to what ultimately happened to its employees. Most likely, they paid dearly for their alleged oversight. Indeed, the men and women operating the printing press served as a conventional scapegoat whenever political disloyalty was alleged. The Publishing House for Foreign Workers was already decimated by the summer of 1937. A staff member in charge of Marxism-Leninism, for example, “confessed” to collaboration with the German and two other intelligence services. She was executed on November 1, 1937.⁴⁷ Editor in Chief of *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* was arrested not once but twice. His second arrest, in December 1937, led to capital punishment the following month. Several other newspaper staff were charged with creating a “counterrevolutionary fascist organization”; one of them was subsequently deported from the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid, 42–43.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 43–44.

⁴⁷ Bobrenev, *Za otsutstviem sostava prestuplenia*, 255–56.

⁴⁸ Reinhard Müller, “‘Wir kommen alle dran’,” 131. Alongside Leningrad-based *Rote Zeitung*, *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* (DZZ) was the most important newspaper catering to German émigrés in the Soviet Union. The newspaper featured lengthy publications by German antifascist writers, who were expected to uplift the morale of the local German workers. As of 1932, DZZ boasted 170 full-time correspondents and 5,000 readers (Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii*, 39–42).

Coming back to the circumstances of Weiss's arrest, the essential question is who was Kurt Funk and what possibly made him discredit a fellow communist. Like Hans Wendt, Kurt Funk was a pen name that belonged to one of the leaders of the German Communist Party in exile, member of the Central Committee Herbert Wehner. Seven years older than Weiss, Wehner originally came from Dresden, too. In fact he grew up in the same neighborhood as Helmut, just a few blocks away. As Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party in Saxony between 1930 and 1931 he may or may not personally have known Helmut Weiss. An earlier encounter between the two is possible, though unlikely: Weiss played no major role in the Communist Party while Wehner was an established functionary.⁴⁹

The internal review of Comintern members extended into all quarters, including literary ones. Shortly before Wehner's arrival in Moscow in January 1937, the press section of the Comintern received instructions to weed out "Trotskyite double-dealers" among the affiliated authors. Embracing the genre of book review as a weapon of self-defense, Wehner jumped on the bandwagon. Within one year, he sank several writers among the political émigrés. Reinhard Müller has speculated as to Wehner's motivation in the section of his 2004 book called "Review as Destruction." In his reviews Wehner weaved ideological conformism into the Manichean logic of Stalinist terror. By resorting to devastating critique, he also compensated for his inferiority complex vis-à-vis other German communist greats Pieck and Ulbricht. More than anything else, however, he sought to shift attention away from accusations leveled against him. To put it bluntly: Wehner wanted to save his own skin.⁵⁰

In a sense, Herbert Wehner exemplifies the mechanisms of Stalinist terror. Wehner was one of the few German Communist Party leaders who escaped from the Third Reich. The ultimate irony is that Wehner himself became a subject of investigation in early 1937. Wehner managed to fend off allegations of collaboration with the Gestapo by testifying against other members of the German Communist Party. By authoring an extensive report on "subversive activities of Trotskyites in the German antifascist movement," he perpetuated a conspiracy theory and reignited the persecution of German émigrés in Stalinist Russia.⁵¹ In late September 1937

⁴⁹ Communication from Wilhelm Mensing, December 2, 2012.

⁵⁰ Reinhard Müller, *Herbert Wehner: Moskau 1937* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2004), 132–45.

⁵¹ Vatlin, *Komintern*, 361–62; Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 113; Reinhard Müller, *Die Akte Wehner: Moskau 1937 bis 1941* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1993), 106, 113, 120–21,

the Comintern Cadres Department launched yet another investigation, charging Wehner with the breach of conspiratorial practices.⁵²

Wehner's book review served as a catalyst rather than immediate cause of Weiss's arrest. Since all articles appearing in *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung*, or any other newspaper for that matter, had been vetted by censorship, the NKVD was able to read the book review before it went to print.⁵³ One way or another, the NKVD arrest warrant of November 16, 1937, said nothing about Weiss's literary activities. Instead, it questioned the circumstances of his arrival in the Soviet Union—information passed down to the NKVD by the Comintern German Section. The investigation was initiated under the notorious Article 58, Paragraph 6, that is, "counterrevolutionary crimes" and espionage.⁵⁴

Helmut's interrogation records from November 21 hark back to his last years in Germany. It turned out that until 1931 he had no citizenship and the German police pressured him to get one. He opted for and got Polish citizenship. Then and again, Helmut explained that many members of his cell were arrested while he survived. One can see why Helmut was so preoccupied with issues of duty, loyalty, and betrayal, which found their way into his writings. The NKVD took it for granted that Helmut Weiss had conspired against the Soviet Union. In the course of the interrogation came the painful reality—something that Helmut had psychologically suppressed—he was persecuted in Nazi Germany not only as a communist but also as a Jew. Obviously he had difficulties spelling it out, referring to himself as "non-Aryan" (*ne ariiskogo proizkhozhdenia*, as the records have it). Apparently, his interrogator was also non-Aryan, though not necessarily Jewish.⁵⁵

Perhaps the most heartbreaking to read are the few surviving letters that Weiss received from his parents in Germany in 1936 and 1937. At some point, in very convoluted language (presumably due to potential Nazi censorship and their own anxiety) Ella and Markus Weiss begged their son to bring them to the Soviet Union. They hinted at the persecution they had endured at the hands of the Nazis when stating that, despite the

137, 142–43. Needless to say, in his 1982 memoir, *Zeugnis: Persönliche Notizen 1929–1942*, Wehner denied any personal responsibility for perpetuating the Great Terror.

⁵² Müller, *Die Akte Wehner*, 142. When Wehner has ex post facto described the atmosphere of fear and subservience in Comintern HQ during the mass arrests, he deliberately spoke in the abstract (Wehner, *Zeugnis*, 217–18).

⁵³ Müller, *Herbert Wehner*, 140

⁵⁴ Weiss NKVD file, arrest warrant, November 18, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁵⁵ Weiss NKVD file, interrogation records, November 21, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

fact that they still had food and a roof above their head, they could no longer exist in Germany as human beings.⁵⁶ What they meant, obviously, was the systematic persecution of Jews by the Nazis. In May 1933 in Dresden, students of the Technical University staged a public burning of books by Jewish authors. The infamous exhibitions the “Degenerate Art” (*Entartete Kunst*) and the “Eternal Jew” (*der ewige Jude*) came to tour the city. Jewish professionals were sacked, their real estate confiscated, and entire neighborhoods proclaimed *judenrein*. On March 1, 1938, a four-hour-long carnival procession under the banner “Exodus of the Children of Israel” passed through the streets of Dresden.⁵⁷

Tragically, Ella and Marcus Weiss believed that, in the face of Nazi brutality and despite their earlier opposition to their son’s political credo, Helmut had established himself in the Soviet Union, and perhaps occupied a position of authority: how could it have been otherwise in the case of a political opponent of the Nazis who sincerely subscribed to the Soviet cause! Obviously, Weiss Junior was in no position to explain to them that this was not the case. Naturally, he could not have taken up their case with the German authorities, but neither could he have approached the Soviet officials due to his own, rather insecure situation. He made it to the Polish Embassy in Moscow, the only other place he knew to go.⁵⁸ The Poles, however, who had been planning for the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” and the Madagascar Plan of their own at that time, were certainly not in the mood to help.

The interrogations, held in the infamous Taganka prison in Moscow, continued through early December 1937. The NKVD twisted Weiss’s arm by implicating him in having illicit contact with suspects inside the USSR and individuals abroad, insinuating that he had attempted to strategically acquire important information, claiming that he intended to sneak into the Kremlin, and that he received financial assistance from foreign countries. This is probably the most violent and abhorrent part of the sham justice administered by the Soviets that made it onto the paper in this particular case: this was when the interrogator consistently accused Weiss of lying. It might as well have been accompanied with intimidation, verbal and/or

⁵⁶ Weiss NKVD file, Ella and Marcus Weiss to Helmut Weiss and Erna Brandt, October 19, 1936, and May 27, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁵⁷ *Buch der Erinnerung. Juden in Dresden: Deportiert, ermordet, verschollen 1933–1945*, ed. Lilli Ulbrich (Dresden: Eckhard Richter & Co, 2006), 10–12.

⁵⁸ Weiss NKVD file, Ella and Marcus Weiss to Helmut Weiss and Erna Brandt, October 19, 1936, and May 27, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

physical abuse, off the record so to say.⁵⁹ The bill of indictment the following day summed up the fabricated charges as follows:

Having arrived from Germany, he led a suspicious lifestyle, established contacts with [ethnic] Germans who worked at the most important state institutions, received certain information from them, expressed his dissatisfaction [with life in the Soviet Union], attempted to sneak into a defense factory, had the intention to sneak into the Kremlin, [and is] suspected of espionage and terrorism. The accused Weiss has confirmed that he has had contact with the Germans and that he received certain information from them.⁶⁰

On December 29, 1937, NKVD's Special Board sentenced Helmut Weiss to ten years of corrective labor on charges of counterrevolutionary activities.⁶¹

Most extraordinarily, in December 1938 Erna Brandt pleaded on behalf of her husband before Lavrenty Beria, the newly appointed head of the NKVD. She was both a courageous and desperate woman who used strong language to make the case for Weiss. Remarkably, she did so not once but twice before different Soviet agencies. Her emotional plea is also the last we know about her. To paraphrase Eugenia Ginsburg, she vanished into the whirlwind. Weiss never heard from her again either. Officially, he remained married to Brandt.

She read the devastating review of Weiss's book. Whether she read *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* on a regular basis or if someone alerted her to the book review, one way or another Brandt learned of the indirect cause of her husband's arrest. She was not afraid of calling names: indeed, Herbert Wehner—whose personality behind the pen name she did not know—was an informer in the direct meaning of the word.⁶² Neither did she know that in May 1938 Wehner, along with Pieck, Ulbricht, and Florin, approved the expulsion of Weiss—along with 157 other communists—from the ranks of the German Communist Party, a standard procedure applied to the arrested German communists.⁶³ As direct as she was about the personality of Weiss, pinpointing the obvious contradiction embedded in the fact that he was Jewish and thus could not possibly be a Nazi (she used the word *fascist*, as was common in the Soviet Union). She implied that,

⁵⁹ Weiss NKVD file, interrogation records, December 3, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁶⁰ Weiss NKVD file, bill of indictment, December 4, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁶¹ Weiss NKVD file, extract from the minutes of the NKVD's Special Conference from December 29, 1937, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁶² Weiss NKVD file, Brandt to Beria, December 28, 1938, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁶³ Mensing, "Einem deutschen Sowjetbürger", 45.

even though he was Jewish, despite the general persecution of Jews in Germany, Weiss stayed put, continuing his important underground work as a communist. Brandt emphasized this point by referring to the brutal treatment of Jews by the Nazis, and specifically the ordeal of Weiss's parents in Dresden in the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom. She stayed in touch with her husband's parents since she knew that Ella Weiss had sought refuge in Krakow, Poland. Significantly, she wrote to Beria that Weiss's father had been severely beaten because his son was a communist who had immigrated into the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ The situation of Jews in Nazi Germany was even more precarious than Brandt described. Most likely, Ella Weiss found herself among the 724 Jews with Polish citizenship who were collected by the police in Dresden on October 27, 1938, and dumped over the Polish border. A further 151 Dresden Jews were dispatched to Buchenwald concentration camp following the November 9–10 pogrom.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, as well as predictably, Brandt's appeal was rejected. The NKVD's final decision of July 25, 1940, is a grotesque document. The NKVD added further, nebulous details attesting to Weiss's subversive activities. The remark of an NKVD investigator to the effect that Weiss's parents worshipped Hitler comes across as insulting in the context of the escalating violence against the Jews in Nazi Germany:

The review of secret materials [*agenturnye materialy*] and personal letters of H. M. Weiss revealed that in 1932 Weiss has published in Kharkov-based *Sturmschritt*, the journal that espoused kulak-nationalist views; has been in close contact with a number of executive employees of the Publishing House for National Minorities [*Natsmenizdat*] (Knorre, Fichtner and others) who had been arrested as counterrevolutionary spies; maintained written correspondence and met in person [*imel ochnuuiu sviaz'*] with the former cadet of the Coastal Defense College in Sevastopol, M. Sh. Poliakov who was subsequently arrested on suspicion of espionage for the benefit of Germany. Moreover, Weiss has persistently requested in his letters to Poliakov to tell him in detail about the latter's life and studies. When working in a political propaganda group in the German Club, he made a strenuous effort to present on stage the ideology [*ideii*] of fascist Germany, tried to surround himself exclusively by Germans—citizens of Germany, and squeezed out Soviet citizens.

That entire political propaganda group had connections with foreign countries and the German Embassy; he maintained frequent correspondence with foreign countries. The most typical [*naibolee kharakternoe*] letter, which included a newspaper clip, was sent to H. M. Weiss by his parents. The contents of the newspaper excerpt can be formulated as follows: Hitler has brought happiness to the German people.

⁶⁴ Weiss NKVD file, Brandt to Beria, December 28, 1938, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁶⁵ *Buch der Erinnerung*, 14.

On the basis of above, I see no [valid] grounds why the decision of the Special Conference regarding H. M. Weiss should be reconsidered.⁶⁶

Das Leben danach/The Life After

The following ten years Weiss spent in Dolinka, Karlag, in Kazakhstan. During the first seven years of his imprisonment he performed physical labor, anything from carting stones and digging earth to casting iron and carrying goods. In 1944, however, his situation improved as he was selected to join the camp musical brigade, first as a piano player and later as a concertmaster. Staging Kálmán's "Countess Maritza" operetta before the camp personnel, the Dolinka brigade needed extras. That's how Helmut met his second wife and my grandmother, Elisabeth Luigas.⁶⁷

How Luigas ended up in the Gulag is a story in its own right. Born in 1918 to an Estonian father and a Russian mother, she gravitated toward Russian culture. The year Weiss was arrested by the NKVD, Luigas joined the Russian Christian Youth Association (an equivalent of YMCA/YWCA). As the name of the organization suggests, she and her fellow members hoped for a religious revival in Soviet Russia. Following the annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union in 1940, the mere fact of membership in this kind of organization was interpreted by the new authorities as counterrevolutionary activity. Luigas was arrested on July 10, 1941, and a year later sentenced by NKVD's Special Board to five years of forced labor (other documents proposed a three-year and/or eight-year term respectively).⁶⁸

Eventually, Luigas's mother back in Estonia was able to establish the whereabouts of her daughter. In reply to her request, in May 1945 the NKVD informed Iraida Luigas that her daughter was serving a term in Dolinka camp.⁶⁹ Both of Weiss's parents were dead by then. His father

⁶⁶ Weiss NKVD file, final decision, July 25, 1940, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290. Following the Nazi seizure of power, any correspondence with relatives in Nazi Germany was regarded a crime. Herbert Wehner expressed a similar opinion at a Comintern party meeting on August 17, 1937 (Vatlin, *Komintern*, 351–52). Soviet authorities were afraid that private letters may contain negative commentaries on the life in the Soviet Union, grist to the enemies' mill. Indeed, some German newspapers used such letters as part of the propaganda campaign against the USSR (Dal, *Ot illiuzii k tragedii*, 58).

⁶⁷ Weiss-Wendt, *Small-Town Russia*, 18–19.

⁶⁸ Elisabeth Luigas NKVD file, ERAF, 130/4728.

⁶⁹ Karlag NKVD to Iraida Luigas, May 5, 1945, in the author's possession.

died in August 1939 and was buried in a Jewish cemetery in Dresden. Ella Weiss vanished without a trace; most likely she was murdered by Nazis in occupied Poland.⁷⁰ As soon as Weiss finished serving his term—Luigas finished hers the previous year—they got married on Christmas day, 1947. Courtesy of the NKVD, from then onward they featured in official documents as Weiss-Wendt. In November 1948 their son, Yuri, was born. Until the age of nine Yuri spent his childhood in the Gulag, officially designated as “the son of the enemies of the people” and sometimes scoffed at by his schoolmates as “fascist.”

As with hundreds of thousands of other victims of Stalinist terror, Weiss was rehabilitated following Khrushchev’s now famous speech, yet not until he officially requested it from the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR in September 1955.⁷¹ After their release from the Gulag, they came to the only place where they had any personal connections at all, the city of Narva in Estonia. They lived through the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Weiss did not officially renounce his Communist Party membership, continuously believing in the ideal of communism—the phenomenon that Nanci Adler has comprehensively analyzed in her recent book.⁷² They outlived most of their jailers: Elisabeth Luigas died in September 1999 and Helmut Weiss, by then almost blind and deaf, a year later. He made no mistake: he lived most of his life and died in exile.

Conclusion

The NKVD interrogation records clearly follow a certain script that had been passed down with the ultimate goal of securing conviction. Incriminating evidence was drawn almost exclusively from hearsay, botched confessions, and twisting the words of the defendants. Helmut Weiss, his political and literary career as a German communist, offered rich material for the “enemy within” mythology. As if it were a checklist, NKVD officials diligently listed the alleged offenses the respective Soviet decrees kept turning out: compromised lifestyle, breach of procedure, unauthor-

⁷⁰ *Buch der Erinnerung*, 381. A Jewish cemetery in Dresden where he is buried was not vandalized during the Nazi years; his tombstone is still standing.

⁷¹ Weiss NKVD file, Moscow Military Prosecutor’s Office, objection re. prosecution of Helmut Weiss-Wendt, April 25, 1956, GARF, 10035/1/M-23290.

⁷² Nanci Adel, *Keeping Faith With the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

ized traveling, moving jobs, ethnic nationalism, lax party vigilance, ideological immaturity, correspondence with relatives abroad, links to the Gestapo, fascist propaganda, espionage, sabotage, terrorism, and counter-revolutionary activities in general. Thus, within the larger context of Stalinist mass violence, his case was not untypical. The only common charge that did not stick to Weiss was “Trotskyism”; as a variation of the above allegation, he was accused of plotting to assassinate members of the Soviet government. What the investigation file does not reveal is the original source of Weiss’s arrest. This information, however, can be found in the Comintern Cadres Department files, known in German historiography as *Kaderakte*. In combination, these two kinds of documents paint a fairly complete picture of the Stalinist political violence directed against foreign communists.

The Stalinist regime practiced expulsion alongside death sentences and longer labor camp terms vis-à-vis foreign communists during the Great Terror. Remarkably, expulsion was also the punishment the NKVD initially proposed in the case of Weiss. Counterintuitively, beyond police surveillance the Gestapo did not uniformly persecute communists deported by the Soviets, unless they were Jewish. Without hard data at hand, it can nevertheless be argued that the extent of political repression against German communists in the Soviet Union in 1937–38 was at least as significant as the persecution of communists who were expelled to Germany from the Soviet Union all the way through 1940. It does not imply a linear relationship between Stalinist and Nazi terror, however. For example, there is nothing to suggest that the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in November 1936 had direct bearing on the purges within the Comintern ranks.⁷³ The latter campaign had a dynamic of its own; indeed, the “verification” campaign goes back to 1931 or even 1925, not to mention the broader context in which the Great Terror emerged.

There is no indication that the NKVD displayed any antisemitic tendencies in their handling of individual cases, including the decision to expel a number of German Jewish communists to Nazi Germany. When Erna Brandt emphasized that her husband was first and foremost a communist, and only then a Jew, she was trying to dispel the notion of “deserting from the battlefields of class struggle” rather than to preemptively debase any antisemitic clichés. Nor is there any evidence that the NKVD paid any attention to the specific interests of the Gestapo when it came to

⁷³ Cf. Bobrenev, *Za otsutstviem sostava prestuplenia*, 437.

deciding the fate of individual German émigrés. At the same time, the Soviet agencies displayed no concern whatsoever for the ultimate fate of these people after they had been handed over to the Nazis.⁷⁴ I concur with Carola Tischler, who has argued that the transfer of German communists to Nazi Germany should be viewed as an extension of the callous Soviet quota system rather than a Faustian bargain between Stalin and Hitler.⁷⁵

It appears that one of the cornerstones of Nazi propaganda—the notion of *Judeobolshevism*—was not applied consistently when it comes to genuine cases of German-Jewish communists. Either of the two identities, ethno-cultural or political, was enough to spark repression, though only the former had lethal consequences for the targeted individual. Significantly, the fifty-two-year-old Markus Weiss was physically mistreated during the November 1938 pogrom in Germany specifically because of his son's political affiliation and the fact that he had immigrated to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, he died a free man in 1939. Many questions still remain unanswered. How did the fact of political emigration from Germany in the first half of the 1930s affect the parents and other close relatives of the émigré, especially if he or she happened to be Jewish? Did the repression intensify, did it take a different form, or did the double identity of the designated enemy play any role at all for the Nazis, despite the thrust of their propaganda?

Evidently, the Soviet authorities had relatively little, if any, knowledge about the nature of Nazi terror or, alternatively, displayed any interest in learning more about its peculiarities, despite the frequent, abstract references to the “fascist” connection of the purported enemies. German fascism, in the face of the Gestapo, was for the Soviets a kind of bogeyman, a conventional, abstract point of reference that served as an aggravated circumstance when it came to exercising political “justice.” Even though, in the long run, the fascist threat and fear of war were justified, for the Soviets the mythical Trotskyite was the archenemy who acted as the agent of all enemies. Hence the talk of the Trotskyite-fascist conspiracy, which became so prominent during the Moscow show trials. And since that was pure fiction—an expression of Stalinist political paranoia—no additional proof was required or sought. In other words, due to ideological blindness, the NKVD did not bother substantiating yet another of its standard, bogus claims. Obviously, incriminating evidence was non-existent in the criminal cases whose ultimate purpose was to eradicate potential opposition to

⁷⁴ Mensing, *Von der Ruhr in den GULag*, 105–106.

⁷⁵ Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung*, 137.

Stalin's regime. So deeply ran the sense of self-righteousness that Chief Soviet Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky even swore by the principles of Stalinist justice ten years later, at the 1947 UN General Assembly. "We are not obliged to submit evidence of any kind beyond the undisputable fact that the past history of the individual in question speaks for itself," he declared.⁷⁶

It is not at all clear that the Nazi security apparatus had any better knowledge about the Great Terror, the Gulag, or any other aspects of Stalinist terror—contrary to the rhetorical statements by some authors, most recently Timothy Snyder.⁷⁷ A majority of Nazi publications on the Gulag were worthless propaganda treatises depicting the central government and the camp administration as Jewish institutions aiming to destroy a host of Russian people by means of forced labor.⁷⁸ At the same time, the Nazis traced the German communists who had immigrated to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. German diplomats in Moscow closely followed the escalation of political violence with the purpose of getting "their men." Otherwise, the Gestapo simply could not keep up with the pace of political repression in the Soviet Union. For example, from a Polish archive comes a 1936 list of some seven hundred communists sought by the Gestapo: about 110 of these individuals fell victim to Stalinist terror.⁷⁹

By early 1941, the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA) had assembled so-called search lists for the USSR that contained some five thousand names. The lists included birth place and date, sometimes the occupation and residence in the USSR of many political émigrés (collected by police and the Gestapo through interrogations of ethnic Germans who had resettled in Germany proper from fall 1939 onward).⁸⁰ It is questionable, however, as to whether the Nazis prioritized hunting down the individuals on these lists following the invasion of the

⁷⁶ Vyshinsky's statement during the debates on extradition of war criminals, *UN Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, 102nd Plenary Meeting (31 October 1947)*, 529.

⁷⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), 177, 196.

⁷⁸ David J. Dallin and Boris Nikolaevsky, *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 313–14.

⁷⁹ Friedrich Firsov, "Die Komintern und die 'Grosse Säuberung'," in *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale. Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt*, ed. Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 361.

⁸⁰ Mensing, *Von der Ruhr in den GULag*, 21. See also Werner Röder, *Sonderfahndungsliste UdSSR* (Erlangen: D + C, 1977).

Soviet Union in 1941, especially after the debacle at Moscow in December of that year. Did the name of Helmut Weiss appear on those lists? I do not know.

CHAPTER 5

Ordinary People Facing Holocaust: The Estonian Security Police Investigation Files, 1941–42

The notion of *ordinary people* is notoriously evasive. Even deciding what constitutes ordinary people or “common folks” appears to be difficult. The term *bystander*, commonly used by Holocaust historians, is not any better for the purpose of analysis. Jan Gross has come up with an effective book title, *Neighbors*, which, however, contributes little to our understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration. Indeed, his critics have argued that by referring to the Polish society of Jedwabne, Gross unintentionally evoked the issue of collective guilt.¹ So far the ambiguity surrounding the notion of ordinary people has not been properly addressed, even though the gap between Gross’ “neighbors” and Christopher Browning’s “ordinary men” is rather substantial.

Views on popular participation in the Nazi persecution of Jews have evolved in circles. Earlier accounts of the Holocaust, based almost exclusively on the proceedings of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, rarely discussed popular perceptions of Jews by the German people. More detailed studies from the 1980s and early 1990s emphasized indifference or apathy in the face of racial discrimination. As David Bankier has summed up in a memorable sentence: “They [the Germans] knew enough to know that it was better not to know more.”² Daniel Johan Goldhagen reversed the discourse by implying, though not substantiating well enough, an inane an-

¹ See, for example, an interview with Tomasz Szarota reprinted in *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, ed. Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 371–85.

² David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 115.

tisemitism on the part of the German population.³ Despite having been heavily criticized, Goldhagen's *Willing Executioners* has renewed the scholarly interest toward the societal dynamics of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." For example, in one of his books Götz Aly exposed the extent to which ordinary Germans benefited, both directly and indirectly, from the expropriation of Jewish property.⁴

The farther east from Germany, the more acrimonious the debate on popular perceptions of the Jews becomes. A significant discussion that has arisen from the publication of Gross' book in Poland is perhaps best known. During the 1990s, local collaboration in the Holocaust became the focal point of research throughout Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the notion of bystander, when applied within the context of Eastern Europe, often comes to encompass both actual killers and passive onlookers. This fallacy is in the first place methodological. There are simply too many differences between Nazi Germany and the western Soviet borderlands to account for. Some of them involve structural issues whereas others have to do with the availability of sources.

Ordinary Germans' attitudes toward the Jews changed over time under the impact of Nazi propaganda and the territorial expansion. These two factors were less pronounced in the areas that had come under Soviet control such as Western Ukraine or Lithuania. The pace, methods, and visibility of destruction were also markedly different. This is well reflected in the archival documents, which are rather scarce in the case of the former Soviet republics. Indeed, a historian seeking to examine popular opinion under the Nazis does not have many primary sources to fall back on. Police reports on the population's mood are available for most of the Nazi-occupied territories. However, as both Ian Kershaw and David Bankier have concluded, police reporting had its limitations due to the restricted informer's network and often mirrored internal tensions and power struggle.⁵ Besides, the interests of the Gestapo were markedly different from those of historians. Wartime periodicals towed the official line, according to which East Europeans were looking for an opportunity to settle scores

³ Daniel Johan Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

⁴ Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005).

⁵ Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 6–10; Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 4–8. See also Aryeh Unger, "The Public Opinion Reports of the Nazi Party," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1965–66): 565–82.

with the evil Judeo-Bolsheviks. Although it was definitely true for some individuals and fringe groups, the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units of the German Security Police and the Security Service) reports do reveal the hands of Germans in inciting anti-Jewish violence.⁶ Postwar courts have summoned witnesses who might help identify and ultimately indict alleged war criminals. However, the function of war crimes trials is to establish individual guilt, not historical record. The belated attempts to collect eyewitness testimonies (for example, by the Shoah Foundation in Los Angeles or Father Patrick Desbois in Paris) can only scratch the surface when it comes to exposing popular perceptions of Jews. In short, none of these kinds of sources can be of much help gauging popular opinion. Even then, we would end up with gross generalizations. With the numbers of victims exceeding tens and hundreds of thousands, we will never know what individual Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, and others thought of their Jewish neighbors. In most cases, Jews were murdered en masse, on the spot, face-to-face with their killers. This stays true for all but one East European country—Estonia.

The Estonian Security Police Investigation Files as a Historical Source

The Estonian case does not fit easily within the conventional story of the Holocaust as it played out in Eastern Europe. The largest percentage of Jews anywhere in Eastern Europe—two-thirds of the total Jewish population—managed to escape from Estonia prior to the arrival of the German troops. Of those who stayed, however, close to 100 percent perished. The destruction of the Estonian Jewish community in the summer and fall of 1941 proceeded differently than in the rest of occupied Eastern Europe. Unlike in Lithuania and Latvia, there was no mob violence, no Jewish ghettos, no summary executions, and no indigenous mobile killing units in

⁶ The oft-quoted passage from Reinhard Heydrich's instructions to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders from June 29, 1941, read as follows: "No obstacles are to be placed in the path of the self-cleansing desires of the anticommunist and anti-Jewish circles in the newly occupied areas. Rather they are to be intensified, when required, without a trace, and channeled onto the proper path, without giving these local 'self-defense circles' any opportunity later to refer to directives or any political assurances." Quoted in *Die Einsatzgruppen in der besetzten Sowjetunion 1941/42: Die Tätigkeits- und Lageberichte der Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*, ed. Peter Klein (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1997), 319.

Estonia. To secure maximum collaboration of indigenous agencies, the head of the German Security Police in Estonia, Dr. Martin Sandberger, delegated the execution of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in that country to his Estonian subsidiary. Most unusually, the Estonian Security Police investigated Jewish “offenders” on an individual basis: each arrested Jew had a case file (which contained a substantial amount of information regarding popular reactions to the persecution of the Jews). The outcome of such quasi-legal investigation was universally a death sentence, which was then carried out by the auxiliary police, *Omakaitse*.

During the first days of the Nazi occupation, Estonian anti-Soviet partisans arrested thousands of people who they believed to be dangerous communists, subject to liquidation. To deal effectively with the growing numbers of arrestees, the so-called Punishment Planning Commissions (*Strafplanungskommissionen*) were established within the Estonian Security Police. Each police prefecture had its own Punishment Planning Commission. Tallinn police prefecture, with its thirteen precincts, was the largest in Estonia; in Tallinn, the commission held its sessions in the central prison. The Punishment Planning Commission was a unique institution in the context of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. Comprised of three Estonian officers and sometimes lawyers, the commission carried out the investigation. To create the outward appearance of a legal procedure, the presiding officers called in the defendants, asking them several pro forma questions. The defendants left without knowing the decision in their case. But there was a decision, and there was a punishment—handwritten on a standard form. Once the investigation was complete, the commission translated the summary of the decision into German and submitted it to the commander of the German Security Police for review. The head of the German Security Police had the authority to halt the investigation if the political crime could not be substantiated. However, this rarely happened because of the personal philosophy of the commander of the German Security Police in Estonia. Sandberger once said that he would rather lock up ten innocent people than set one offender free.⁷

The Estonian National Archives in Tallinn contains a large collection of police investigation records. Among about four thousand case files, slightly over four hundred belonged to Jews. Taking into account that the number of Jews who stayed in Estonia did not exceed one thousand, the four hundred available files comprise a fairly good sample. The investiga-

⁷ Commander of the German Security Police in Estonia Sandberger to police branch offices, May 18, 1943, ERA, R-59/1/8.

tion files have attributes of a legitimate legal inquiry and include the following: warrants for arrest, protocols of interrogation, witness testimonies, decisions, and at times interoffice correspondence. Occasionally, one finds search warrants and records, correspondence from relatives and rare intercessors, and in a few cases execution orders and death certificates. The case files vary in length between one and forty pages, with an average length of six pages. Usually, the only document in German in the case file is a summary of the decision. The bulk of the investigation files come from Tallinn-Harju police prefecture, in whose jurisdiction the majority of the Estonian Jews found themselves in August and September of 1941.

The significance of the police investigation files is hard to overstate. The story of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe is usually told from the perspective of perpetrators or survivors. The very word *survivor* implies that the majority of those who were targeted perished. What is left of the millions of dead is often statistics—dates, figures, names—and sometimes not even that. There are few eyewitnesses apart from the perpetrators themselves who could tell how entire Jewish communities were turned into nameless victims. The Estonian Security Police investigation files may help us to convert abstract knowledge into a more matter of fact narrative.

Arrest warrants almost always contained the word *Jewish*. When it came to the Jews, their ethnicity alone sufficed as a basis for arrest. However, only half of all judicial decisions bore reference to the ethnicity of the defendants. Jews were dispatched to jail as communist sympathizers or, at the very least, as individuals subversive to the new regime. This incongruity between objective and means is crucial to explain the mindset of those who condemned the Jews to death. For such an explanation one needs look no further than the protocols of interrogation and witness testimonies. What is striking about these criminal proceedings is that the Germans were hardly mentioned. Upon reading minutes of an interrogation, one gets the impression that Estonians and Jews were settling a dispute regarding Jews' allegiance to the Estonian state. Although all those later charged were indeed arrested as Jews, they had to prove that they did not have a malicious intent toward Estonians. Being part of the Soviet system was equivalent to a guilty plea. Therefore, the investigators went to great lengths to establish the connection between Jews and the Soviet regime. At the base of all accusations was the belief that the Jews had placed themselves in opposition to the Estonian state and the Estonian people. In short, the Jews had betrayed Estonia! If that was impossible to prove, the Jews were branded subversive to the new regime. If that charge

could not be substantiated either, Jewish origin automatically became a criminal offense.

Letters of Support and Denunciations

Ironically, Estonians only got to know Jews during the year of Soviet occupation, 1940–41. Until then, encounters between the two ethnic groups were for the most part limited to business transactions: Estonian customers shopped in Jewish-owned stores, let Jewish tailors repair their garments, or at best went to see a Jewish dentist. Jews fitted neatly within stereotypes, which neither side cared to revise. That changed abruptly in the summer of 1940. Scholars who have written about the Jewish experience under Soviet rule have noted the increased visibility of Jews in a position of authority. Those Jews whose social status had changed for the worse, however, went unnoticed. With their businesses expropriated by the state, many Jews entered the general workforce for the first time. The most widespread but also least demanding type of organization at that time was the workers' cooperative, the so-called *artel*. It is in this forum that Jewish artisans, who until that point had had their own workshops, started to mingle with other laborers.

All but one petition submitted to the Estonian Security Police on behalf of the arrested Jews originated from their fellow workers. Colleagues of Abe Bass, Estonians and Russians alike, pleaded with police authorities to allow him to return to their cooperative. If nothing else was possible—eleven coworkers of the Flora Cooperative appealed to the Tallinn police prefect—perhaps Bass could resume his duties on parole. The undersigned said they were ready to take full responsibility. All records indicate that the petitioners were sincere in their desire to help out their coworker. The letters of support were drafted within the first few days following the arrest. Practical considerations were mentioned only in passing, if at all. Abe Bass was said to have helped raise the productivity of the *artel*. Four men of the Lagermetall cooperative claimed that Mikhail Sheer was an indispensable specialist without whom they could not proceed. The artisans advanced three arguments in support of the detainee: he was anti-communist through and through; he had helped Estonians evade Soviet repression; he had nothing to do with the rest of the Jews. Eighteen people signed the petition on behalf of Salomon Epstein, a worker in their sewing cooperative. They knew that Epstein was arrested because of his ethnicity. Although he was Jewish, they wrote, Epstein was a loyal citizen. Further-

more, while Epstein hated Jews, he maintained good relations with the members of the cooperative—all of them Estonians. According to the petitioners, Epstein posed as an ardent anticommunist who had impatiently waited for the Germans to arrive. Somewhat naively, Epstein's coworkers explained that he did not get along with the local Jews after having married a German woman. When the Soviets took over, those very Jews allegedly refused to take Epstein into their cooperative.⁸

Flora workers tried to convince the authorities that Bass had many friends in Germany, even within the Nazi Party. Bass refused to evacuate to Russia proper even though he knew that Jews were treated as "undesirable elements" in Germany. During the Bolshevik terror, Bass had helped Estonians by all means possible. Sheer conducted himself similarly, arranging for members of the Lagermetall to be relieved from the obligatory defense works in the summer of 1941. Furthermore, he helped two of them evade mobilization. Fifteen architects, engineers, and craftsmen appealed on behalf of Abram Iliashev before the Security Police in Tallinn. Iliashev was always ready to help his fellow citizens. In particular, Iliashev was said to have hidden non-Jews from Soviet deportation. Apparently, there was nothing to illustrate the anticommunist agenda of sixty-eight-year-old Iliashev, and his colleagues went on to say that he stayed away from politics altogether. The absolute record of petition co-signers was twenty-five—that is how many people appealed on behalf of Härmo Pant. They described Pant as an honest and accommodating person who had no communist connections whatsoever.⁹ In one case, a group of scholars from the University of Tartu petitioned on behalf of Samuel Zlaff, assistant to renowned Estonian professor Ludvig Puusepp.¹⁰

However few were petitions on behalf of the Jews, the number of letters denouncing them was not significantly greater. In some cases, denunciation was implied. Several police reports began as follows: "in accordance with information received" or "it turned out that . . ." (However, this does not rule out the possibility that informants came from within the police and/or the Omakaitse.) The following report was filed on September 14 in Nõmme near Tallinn. A policeman notified his superiors that he received information about a male Jew living on 38 Kadaka Boulevard.

⁸ Salomon Epstein (name denotes respective case file of the Estonian Security Police), ERA, R-64/4/185; Mikhail Sheer, ERA, R-64/4/914; Abe Bass, ERA, R-64/4/1048.

⁹ Salomon Epstein, ERA, R-64/4/185; Mikhail Sheer, ERA, R-64/4/914; Abe Bass, ERA, R-64/4/1048; Abram Iliashev, ERA, R-64/4/220; Härmo Pant, ERA, R-64/4/600.

¹⁰ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 225.

Once he got there, he indeed discovered someone called Israel Baskin. Baskin's ID revealed his Jewish origin ("ethnicity" was one of the entries in Estonian identification documents).¹¹

It was something other than moral inhibitions or fear of revenge that motivated the individuals who decided to stay anonymous in making their denunciations. If they so chose, the authorities could easily have established the identity of the unnamed informants. On October 11, 1941, one of the Omakaitse offices in Tallinn received an anonymous letter that read: "I'm drawing your attention to the fact that on 122 Pärnu Ave lives the Salome family (Polish Jews). They are extremely hostile to Germans and can become dangerous." The letter was forwarded first to a local police commissar and then to the head of the Estonian Security Police. Apparently, the police had already received instructions with regard to denunciations; a handwritten note in the margins urged them to investigate and proceed in accordance with the guidelines.¹²

Anna Kalmanson could have survived the war had it not been for a neighbor's denunciation. By March 1942, there were only few Jews left in Estonia. The "Jewish Question" was no longer on the agenda for the police force, which had more pressing tasks to perform. The postcard that the police constable of the Tallinn sixth district received on March 27 was obviously written by somebody from the lower social order. An anonymous addressee who signed only his or her initials "J. K.," informed the police that Edla Linneberg had been hiding a Jew in her apartment. Written chaotically, in grammatically incorrect Estonian, the account betrayed the selfish interests of the author. Without a single comma, the anonymous author painstakingly listed all pieces of furniture and household items belonging to Kalmanson (who was mentally ill) that Linneberg had allegedly appropriated. The informer ended her letter by saying that drinking orgies in Linneberg's apartment disrupted peace in the house. In all probability, the author of the letter was Alma Helene Kolle, the landlady, whom the police questioned shortly after they received the denunciation.¹³

This and other similar cases call for a modification of the generic term *neighbor*. Neighbors, or anyone else who knew Jews under arrest, were routinely summoned to the Security Police to testify. Some testimonies were positive, some negative. It was the landlords, however, who steadfastly denounced Jews living on their premises. The Estonian Security

¹¹ Israel Baskin, ERA, R-64/4/135.

¹² Rebecca Salome, ERA, R-64/4/800.

¹³ Anna Kalmanson, ERA, R-64/4/957.

Police encouraged the flow of denunciations by ordering landlords to compile lists of tenants for presentation in the police precincts.¹⁴ Apparently, some homeowners reported Jews just to be on the safe side. As regards personal motives for making denunciations, greed overruled all other motives. Hatred is a strong emotion that galvanizes immediate action. Why, for instance, wait seven months before exposing a Jewish woman who had not even tried to hide? That is, however, exactly what “J. K.” did with respect to Anna Kalmanson.

The services sector tended to generate more denunciations than any other occupation. While male artisans sometimes exhibited solidarity with their fellow Jewish workers, women in menial professions every so often evoked the ghost of communism to get rid of their Jewish colleagues. Daisy Jaanimägi, an accountant in one of the state-owned stores in Tallinn, accused Ginda Rosenberg of subversive views. Jaanimägi informed the Estonian Security Police at Tallinn-Nõmme that she found the employment of a Jew as a cashier, that is, in a senior position, to be objectionable. State property should be protected against the Jews, who are discontent with our state order, she wrote. Another accountant in yet another Tallinn store blatantly accused Sonia Gasman of being communist. The denunciation led to the latter’s arrest on August 29, 1941.¹⁵ Almost all denunciations were authored by women, a persistent trend in Nazi-occupied Europe.¹⁶ Salme Teder was one of those women who denounced Jews. Within days after the German Army seized Tallinn, Teder notified the Estonian police of the whereabouts of Hanna Kronik. She insisted that Kronik, a Jew, stayed in contact with a member of a Soviet shock battalion.¹⁷ There is no indication as to what motivated Gentile women to inform on Jewish women. I would suggest setting personal scores as one of the primary motives. However, anticommunism might have played a role as well.

The practice of denunciation in Estonia displays both similarities and dissimilarities with the general trends historians observed elsewhere in

¹⁴ Commander of the German Security Police in Estonia Sandberger, annual report from July 1941 to June 30, 1942, ERA, R-819/1/12.

¹⁵ Sonia Gasman, ERA, R-64/4/146; Ginda Rosenberg, ERA, R-64/4/1140.

¹⁶ Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann has challenged the view that women are more prone to informing than men. According to Diewald-Kerkmann, women accounted for 11 percent of all political denunciations in Nazi Germany. Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, “Politische Denunziation im NS-Regime: Die kleine Macht der ‘Volksgenossen’,” in *Denunziation: Historische, juristische und psychologische Aspekte*, ed. Günter Jerouschek, Inge Marssolek, and Hewig Räckelein (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1997), 150.

¹⁷ Hanna Kronik, ERA, R-64/4/288.

Europe, including Nazi Germany. Only a nominal proportion of “Jewish” case files in Estonia can be traced back to denunciation—5 percent versus 70 percent in Germany. The relatively low number of denunciations specifically targeting Jews can be explained by two factors. Those Estonian Jews who stayed behind made a conscious choice and therefore did not intend to hide. With a few exceptions, Jews could be easily located without help from the general population. A high level of organization in the Estonian Security Police and the Omakaitse enabled them to proceed instantaneously with the arrests of Jews. The proficiency and dedication of individual members of these two agencies required little popular input in the apprehension of Jews. In contrast to the Gestapo in Germany, the Estonian police was active rather than reactive.¹⁸ Furthermore, the German Security Police in Estonia was not keen on initiating proceedings based on denunciation alone. On January 10, 1942, Sandberger instructed his Estonian counterpart Ain Ervin Mere to ensure that the arrests were carried out on the basis of solid evidence and not mere denunciation. Sandberger advised Mere to start prosecuting denouncers themselves.¹⁹

Witness Testimonies

Letters of support and denunciation mark the extreme poles of popular opinion. Individual testimonies provide a more accurate overview of what ordinary Estonians thought of Jews. Unlike petitioners and informers, people who came to testify did so involuntarily and therefore had no personal stake in the outcome of the investigation. Estonian Security Police picked up random individuals who could provide information about Jews under arrest. Sometime it was the defendants who drew a list of witnesses who could potentially testify on their behalf. Otherwise, the police questioned neighbors, landlords, colleagues, all those who knew the arrestee in question. Most, if not all, Jews were innocent and therefore steadfastly denied any wrongdoings on their part. Many of them did indeed believe

¹⁸ Robert Gellately, “Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic,” in *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789–1989*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 193, 196; Robert Gellately, “The Gestapo and German Society: Political Denunciation in the Gestapo Case Files,” *Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 4 (1988): 654–94.

¹⁹ Commander of the German Security Police in Estonia Sandberger to the head of the Estonian Security Police Mere, January 10, 1942, ERA, R-819/2/7.

that justice would prevail and that they would eventually be cleared of all charges. None of the arrested Jews anticipated his or her fate. It would be unrealistic then to expect that the Estonians who were summoned by the police to testify would know what was going to happen to the Jews next. Some of the witnesses chose their words carefully when they spoke about the Jews, while others did not. No matter what they said, the witnesses did not know that the prisoners' fate was sealed. For the very same reason, the investigation saw no need to apply pressure to extract politically correct testimonies from the witnesses.

Some people made assumptions about the political affiliation of a particular Jew based on the personal traits of the latter. Marie Laande confessed that she would not be able to testify about the political outlook of Hessel Aronovich, simply because the latter had never talked about politics. Yet Laande believed that Aronovich did not support the Soviet Union. Otherwise, Aronovich appeared a decent person to the witness. Hirsh Ballak, who from April 1941 worked in a chemistry laboratory, appealed to the investigation team to call several witnesses who could supposedly corroborate his anticommunist stance. Ballak hastened to add that since his coreligionists stayed away from him, he had mixed mainly with Estonians. Alexander Villemsoo did not betray his Jewish associates' expectations, saying that Ballak did not approve of communism, neither before nor during the Soviet occupation. As a reserved and slightly suspicious individual, Ballak did not deal with politics and at times used harsh language to describe communists' conduct in Estonia.²⁰

Other witnesses openly sympathized with the arrested Jews by extolling their human qualities and emphasizing their services before the Estonian people. Benjamin Nieländer said that, as a physician, Josell Abramson performed his duties in an exemplary manner. It was commonly said, Nieländer continued, that Abramson had helped to exempt several Estonian men from mobilization by issuing them medical certificates. Abramson did not share communist ideas, nor was he hostile to the Estonian people. Abram Saltsmann earned a similar description from Joosep Partes and Juuli Utto. A decent and quiet individual, Saltsmann worked long hours at a paper mill. Saltsmann's neighbors confirmed that he did not get involved in politics, let alone was affiliated with the Communist Party. In fact, Saltsmann was illiterate. Boris Niinemets owed his freedom to Leib Lipelis, and he did not forget it. Lipelis was aware of Niinemets' membership in the Kaitseliit (a paramilitary organization similar in its functions to

²⁰ Hessel Aronovich, ERA, R-64/4/23; Hirsh Ballak, ERA, R-64/4/136.

the German Schutzkorps) and yet took him into the cooperative. Later on Lipelis warned Niinemets about his impending arrest, provided him with money, and made other necessary arrangements that guaranteed his safety. At one point Lipelis told Niinemets that he would rather go to a Nazi concentration camp than to Russia.²¹

The well-wishers among the witnesses tried to be helpful by dissociating a particular Jew they knew from the rest of the Jewry. That argument had as little effect on the Estonian Security Police as any other. The last time Maksim Kagan, a professional chemist, visited a synagogue was in 1910. Kagan had converted to Protestantism and had even purchased a burial ground in the biggest Estonian Lutheran cemetery in Tallinn. Kagan got two well-known individuals to testify on his behalf. The Minister of Agriculture in independent Estonia, Bernhard Rostfeldt, had known Kagan since 1921. Villem Sepp also claimed a twenty-year acquaintance with Kagan. Both men said in one voice that Kagan communicated widely with all ethnic groups—Estonians, Germans, Russians—except Jews. In the absence of any incriminating evidence, Kagan was charged with participation in subversive activities. In addition to twenty-five people who signed a petition on his behalf, Härmo Pant received support from two other men. A retired officer, Alexander Reinfeld knew the accused since he was a child. According to Reinfeld, Pant had never participated in communist activities of any sorts, kept his distance from local Jews, and last but not least, was married to an Estonian woman. Jüri Pinding said that Pant belonged to a group of pro-Estonian Jews. Furthermore, he did not even look Jewish. In the case of Gottfried Firk, witnesses seem to have come to an understanding before testifying. Indeed, the testimonies of Arnold Friedrich Ernesaks, Nikolai Vaher, Vello Kasenurm, and Mart Margiste sounded suspiciously similar when praising Firk as a loyal citizen of Estonia. Appointed as the head of Soiuzutil (scrap collection), Firk had allegedly refused to fill positions with his fellow Jews, favoring Estonians instead. Firk claimed that Jews occupied 90 percent of all the top positions in the Soviet Union, and therefore wanted an Estonian as his deputy. According to all four witnesses, Firk had demonstrated the greatest reverence toward Estonia and Estonians, an attitude that placed him in opposition to the rest of the Estonian Jews. A similar theme was present in the testimonies of Alexander Siimon and Eduard Ristmees on behalf of Gershon Herzenberg. Siimon thought highly of Herzenberg, arguing that

²¹ Jossel Abramson, ERA, R-64/4/36; Abram Saltzman, ERA, R-64/4/778; Leib Lipelis, ERA, R-64/4/458.

the latter behaved differently to the rest of the Jews, who had sought nothing but profit. Ristmees agreed that Herzenberg, unlike other Jews, was not hostile toward the Estonian people.²²

Another way of presenting a particular Jew in a favorable light was to say that he or she had suffered under the communist regime. Raul Simson began his testimony by saying that he had known Harry Itskovich for three years, but had mainly communicated with him in 1940. Simson portrayed Itskovich as an opponent of communism whose parents had been deported, and whose property had been confiscated. Simson conveyed his belief that Itskovich had not participated in any kind of anti-Estonian activities. Arnold Michelson used similar words to defend Salomon Epstein, who he said was an adversary of the communist government. Epstein lost his son to the Soviet deportation and had his shop nationalized. Oskar Mõlts used to buy leather goods from Rachmiel Shadsunsky's workshop. The next time he met Shadsunsky, the former was working in a warehouse of the tannery Unioon. Mõlts had the following to say about Shadsunsky:

It seemed that he did not approve of the Soviet regime. Shadsunsky once told me that if he wanted to get rich, he could have gotten a better position for himself. That makes me think that he did not belong to the Communist Party. Shadsunsky told me that he did not want to go to Russia because he thought that the Germans would not do any harm to such a poor Jew as himself.²³

The Estonians that testified against Jews sometimes placed their allegations into the context of the Russo-German war. Ella Brodsky, as a Jew, was accused of calling Germans "robbers," whom the Russians would have soon dislodged from Estonia. The charges were based solely on the testimony of Helmi Jõõras. Brodsky dismissed the allegations as a lie. Her entire family stood opposed to communism, Brodsky said. The woman swore that she had never said anything to anybody about the Germans. None of what Brodsky said in fact mattered; she was sentenced as Jew-communist.²⁴ A number of testimonies displayed xenophobia and prejudice. Olev Arens argued that all members of the Jewish fraternity Limuvia at the University of Tartu, including Eduard Eitelberg, were agents of the NKVD. At the same time, the witness acknowledged that he did not per-

²² Maksim Kagan, ERA, R-64/4/281; Härmo Pant, ERA, R-64/4/600; Gottfried Firk, ERA, R-64/4/868; Gershon Herzenberg, ERA, R-64/4/902.

²³ Harry Itskovich, ERA, R-64/4/248; Salomon Epstein, ERA, R-64/4/185; Rachmiel Shadsunsky, ERA, R-64/4/913.

²⁴ Ella Brodsky, ERA, R-64/4/87.

sonally know Eitelberg. He just thought Eitelberg was suspiciously active in the wake of the German attack on the Soviet Union. The same investigation file contains two testimonies in support of Eitelberg. Neither Elmar Velner nor Ervin Mägi noticed anything that would have betrayed the communist affiliations of their Jewish colleague. The very fact that Eitelberg was continually present at his workplace made his participation in a shock battalion or workers' militia unlikely.²⁵ Only a fraction of the witness testimonies contained the traditional Judeobolshevik discourse. From the perspective of those witnesses, Jewish visibility was sufficient proof of Jews' pro-communist stance. Marie Tiitsmaa was one of those who saw a logical nexus between the two. From 1939, Abram Sachar-Schocher rented an apartment in the house where Tiitsmaa lived. Sachar-Schocher ran a dry-cleaning shop until the Soviets made him director of a store that sold car parts. According to Tiitsmaa, she realized right away Sachar-Schocher was a communist sympathizer. He had always boasted of his high position, and he was Jewish. This one testimony was enough to sent Sachar-Schocher to jail.²⁶

In some testimonies, elements of Judeobolshevism were interspersed with selfish motives, first and foremost greed. Of the hundreds of Jews who were arrested in 1941, Rochelle Hanin was the only one charged with serving in the NKVD. Born in Estonia, Hanin had spent ten years in Paris. Hanin was visiting her parents in Estonia when the war broke out. Unable to return to France, she moved into the house on 23 Viljandi Street in Tallinn that belonged to thirty-one-year-old Johannes Laugsoo. In the wake of Soviet occupation, the NKVD arrested three of the tenants, two officers and a lawyer. At that time Hanin was dating a Jewish man called Elias Veinberg, who eventually moved into her apartment. According to Laugsoo, one day in July of 1941 the following conversation took place between Veinberg and himself. Veinberg told the landlord that the garden attached to the house would soon belong to Hanin and himself. Upon being asked why that would be so, Veinberg allegedly answered that as NKVD employees they had priority. The investigators announced the charges against Rachelle Hanin without revealing their source. But Hanin immediately identified the personality of the accuser: Laugsoo had slandered her because she was greedy! As a landlord, Laugsoo had the keys of Hanin's apartment. According to the arrestee, the homeowner appropriated some of her belongings while she was away. When Hanin requested

²⁵ Eduard Eitelberg, ERA, R-64/4/186.

²⁶ Abram Sachar-Schocher, ERA, R-64/4/775.

her property back, Laugsoo libeled her as an NKVD agent in order to get rid of her. To prove her innocence, Hanin suggested questioning two other individuals, Gershon Herzenberg and Josef Hirschhorn (both of whom were later arrested.) Instead, the police summoned one of the Hanin's neighbors, Ekaterina Käär, to testify. Käär ensured Hanin's execution. As it turned out, she had been watching the movements of her Jewish neighbor closely. Käär confirmed that Veinberg frequented Hanin's apartment. Furthermore, she had seen him together with NKVD men. The witness proved her powers of observation when she told the police that at one point in August an NKVD car stopped in front of the house where Hanin and Veinberg lived. Another fifteen minutes passed before they all drove away in the direction of downtown Tallinn. Käär noticed that the NKVD men treated the couple with respect, a sign that they were on friendly terms. About an hour later, the very same car brought Hanin and Veinberg back. Käär also knew that the deputy head of Tallinn central prison, a Soviet Russian, lodged in one of the rooms of Hanin's apartment. The witness chose to be precise even with respect to minor details: she did not know whether any Estonians had suffered as a result of Hanin and Veinberg's activities. Rachelle Hanin was sentenced on two counts—for being Jewish and working for the NKVD.²⁷

One of the most remarkable investigation files belonged to Miriam Lepp. Everything was unusual about her case—the length, the dates, and even the agency that instituted the proceedings. On January 28, 1942, the head of Department B-IV of the German Security Police sent a request to the Tallinn-Harju prefecture regarding one Miriam Lepp. Forty-five-year-old Miriam Lepp, Jewish, was married to a high-ranking Estonian police official, with whom she lived at Kurtna Manor in Harjumaa province. It took the Estonian Security Police half a year to process the case. The contents of the thirty-four-page-long file explain this delay. First on the list of witnesses was Hans Vahtramäe, who told the police that the wife of Konstantin Lepp was a “person totally belonging to the Jewish faith.” Referring to somebody he knew, the witness argued that Lepp, who claimed high-ranking patrons, had been spreading provocative rumors. It would be wise to eliminate Miriam Lepp, he said, for she did not know how to run the farmstead. The latter statement might have been true, because after her husband was arrested by the Soviet authorities in September 1941, Miriam Lepp had to take over the household. The brother of Konstantin Lepp found it suspicious that Miriam had not been arrested along with her hus-

²⁷ Rochelle Hanin, ERA, R-64/4/905.

band. It was probably because Miriam's brothers occupied important positions under the Soviets, Alexander Lepp speculated. One thing he knew for sure: Miriam Lepp was Jewish. It was rumored that Miriam Lepp had converted to Christianity. It remained to be seen, however, Alexander Lepp concluded in his testimony, whether this would really prevent her from being Jewish. To be sure on this issue, the police questioned a cleric who confirmed that Miriam Lepp did indeed voluntarily abandon Judaism to become a Christian. In accordance with the order of April 24, 1942, Miriam Lepp was arrested and sent to Tallinn. Like thousands of others, Lepp was dispatched to Tallinn central prison, charged with communist activities.²⁸

One can hardly imagine a person more pro-Estonian than Miriam Lepp (born Firk). Miriam grew up in Estonia, speaking Estonian at home. Following her marriage to Konstantin Lepp in 1934, Miriam stopped communicating with her family altogether. Lepp went as far as to argue during the interrogation that she was a convinced antisemite. Lepp rejected as "absurd" the accusation that she had remained at large thanks to her Jewish brothers, who had allegedly worked for the Soviet regime. To further prove her allegiance to the Estonian cause, Lepp said that in the summer of 1941 she hid several policemen who had deserted the Red Army. Lepp listed twelve individuals, all Estonians, who could have testified on her behalf. Over the next month the Estonian Security Police questioned a total of eighteen witnesses, including the two policemen whose lives Lepp had saved. The police wanted to know three things: Miriam Lepp's attitude toward Jews; her political views; and what she did in 1940–41. One after another, the witnesses portrayed Miriam Lepp in the best possible light. For Lepp, her marriage had opened the door to Estonian high society. She had a wide circle of acquaintances, exclusively Estonian. Witnesses agreed that Miriam Lepp was more than just loyal to the Estonian state; indeed she was an Estonian patriot. Lepp severed all contacts with the Jewish community. Her attitude toward Bolshevism was extremely negative, hostile, and bitter. In 1918, it was the Germans who released Miriam Lepp from Riga's prison into where the communists had thrown her. One of the policemen who found refuge at Kurtina said that Lepp welcomed the German troops as liberators. Lepp found relief talking to other women, whose husbands had been arrested by the Soviets. According to one of them, Miriam said that she was ashamed to have been born Jewish. Upon the question—what would have happened to the Jews if the Ger-

²⁸ Miriam Lepp, ERA, R-64/4/424.

mans were to arrive in Estonia—Lepp allegedly answered that she did not care, and that Jews would have been justly punished for they had brought about communism. Lepp reacted in a most unusual way when she learned about the persecution of Jews in Estonia: if she, too, ended up in a concentration camp, the Jewish inmates would have most likely killed her there.²⁹

The German Security Police became increasingly impatient with their Estonian counterparts, so that on July 3, 1942, the head of the Department A-IV Paul Seyler ordered Miriam Lepp's execution. From prison, on July 9 Lepp sent a desperate plea, trying one last time to prove her innocence:

I grew up completely in the Estonian spirit. The first language I learned to speak was Estonian. In my home, we have always fulfilled our duties to our Homeland. Both my brothers volunteered in the Estonian War of Liberation. I have been interested in Estonian literature and history since I was a child. Konstantin Lepp, as a renowned public figure in Estonia, would never have married me if I did not bear in me the Estonian spirit. I have only moved in Estonian circles. Jews are alien to me; I have never had any contacts with them. I have always felt myself being Estonian and I will remain that forever. I had neither interest nor penchant for doing dirty business. My dream was to live in the countryside.

The Reds arrested my husband on September 25, 1940. That is when my troubles began. I survived only because I hid myself. I risked my life hiding four police officials and several other Estonian men and women. Please call to testify on my behalf Director of the Interior Mr. Oskar Angelus and his deputy Mr. Johannes Raid . . .

I beg your understanding of the unbearable situation in which I would have found myself if I were to be sent to a camp among the people from whom I have become alienated due to my upbringing and my habits. But if the current situation will not give me an opportunity to live as a full member of the society, as a last resort, please intern me at my husband's farm under the control of the local administration. Please take into account my husband's situation and all the good that I have done to the Estonian people. I hope that my request will be considered.

Four days later Miriam Lepp was executed.³⁰

Structural Explanation of Collaboration

The *modus operandi* of the Estonian Security Police raises many questions. Most important, why the mass murder of Jews in Estonia proceeded differently from the other Baltic countries? The degree of autonomy the Estonian Security Police came to enjoy had by far surpassed that of the native police forces in Latvia and Lithuania. Like its Estonian counterpart,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

the Lithuanian Security Police did investigate individual cases. However, its authority did not extend to Jews.³¹ At most, the police participated in the arrest and interrogation of those Jews who had escaped from the ghettos.³² In Latvia, the organization of the security police bore no resemblance to the parallel structure that Sandberger pioneered in Estonia. In fact, by the end of 1943 the Latvian division within the Security Police had all but disappeared.

Let me come back for a moment to the case of Miriam Lepp discussed above. Why drag it on for so long when everyone in the Estonian Security Police knew that Lepp would have been condemned to death anyway? At a time when the police personnel had a backlog of cases to clear, they spent six months pursuing a Jewish woman whose fate was predetermined.³³ First Miriam Lepp was a woman, and second she was completely integrated into Estonian society. That might have had a certain effect on the police rank-and-file, who definitely did not want to appear as hardened killers. Yet in the case of such a strictly regulated body as the Security Police, individual motivation has to give way to structural explanation. To execute Miriam Lepp on the basis of her ethnicity alone, without first trying to tailor the accusation to fit the anticommunist matrix, would have defied the purpose of the Estonian Security Police, which was originally set up as a guardian of tradition and order. That would be tantamount to confessing murderous contempt for justice, which it was indeed. There was a semantic nuance to it too: Department B-IV of the Estonian Security Police (nearly identical to the Gestapo in Germany proper) was called in Estonian, "Political Police" (*Poliitiline Politsei*). Thus, the Estonian Security Police was trying hard to live up to its name. Members of the Estonian Security Police saw themselves as bearers of the Estonian national idea, but so did Miriam Lepp. The former had to murder the latter so as to prove its righteousness.

Estonians' attitude toward Jews tended to be rather pragmatic, with no extreme emotions recorded. Unwilling to concede the fundamental

³¹ Knut Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord: Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 64–65.

³² Michael MacQueen, "Einheimische Gehilfin der Gestapo: Die litauische Sicherheitspolizei in Vilnius 1941–1944," in *Holocaust in Litauen: Krieg, Judenmorde und Kollaboration im Jahre 1941*, ed. Vincas Bartusevičius, Joachim Tauber, and Wolfram Wette (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 104–108, 113f.

³³ Birn, "Collaboration with Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe," 186. See also Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei in Estland 1941–1944*.

flaws within their respective states, which surrendered to Soviet power in 1940 without a single shot fired, Estonians shifted the blame for their misfortunes onto others. Soviet terror and the frustration caused by the demise of a nation-state prompted hostility. The appropriate targets of this hostility, however, could not be easily identified, for communist and Soviet cadres had enough time to flee Estonia. The hostility, augmented by a sense of injustice committed, was therefore displaced and directed toward substitute targets. Finding a scapegoat (in this case Jews) made people believe that they were in control of the situation. It also erased one's own responsibility for any of the past mistakes and thus eliminated any sense of guilt. Aggression is an effective self-defense mechanism that reestablishes self-esteem and public esteem. What we observe here is not actual justice, but the perception of justice. Whoever is held responsible for the injustice committed will often be perceived as evil and deserving of punishment.

The Estonian people, as a collective, sought redress for both the unfulfilled promise of nation-state and the near-death experience of Soviet terror. The head of the German Security Police in Estonia Sandberger carefully led the traumatized nation through the stages of recovery and into the brighter future of Hitler's "New Europe." Like a skillful but corrupt therapist, Sandberger granted the Estonians as much autonomy as was possible under the conditions of occupation. He gave power to the Estonian Security Police, which then opened a quasi-legal investigation into crimes committed against the Estonian people. Although a mockery of justice, it appeared as a genuine attempt to bring offenders to account. This was not the case in Latvia and Lithuania, where the occupation regime subjected its people to tight control, thus aggravating the feeling of humiliation they experienced under Soviet occupation. By unleashing bloody pogroms and organizing death squads, the Nazis quenched the resentment felt by many Latvians and Lithuanians. In the long run, however, it had the opposite effect on the collective psyche of these two peoples, who now started comparing Nazi policies with those of the Soviets.

Those Estonians who took part in the persecution of Jews were motivated by a set of confusing, potentially flammable ideas. They came to embrace the Nazi slogans that promised Estonia a position in Hitler's New Europe equal to that of other countries. At no point in time, neither before nor during the war, did Estonians subscribe to Nazi racial ideology. Whatever Estonians said or did, their end goal was to rehabilitate the Estonian state, which had collapsed like a house of cards in 1940. The perception was that in order to successfully fight Russian communism, which had

robbed Estonia of its independence, one ought to demonstrate the superiority of Estonian culture over that of the “Asiatics.”

Estonians sought to demonstrate to the new rulers that they were different, that they had higher standards than their communist oppressors or even their Baltic neighbors, and therefore should be treated as equals by the Nazis. One way of doing so was by substituting lynch justice with a form of justice that could be accepted by the majority of the population as legitimate. Thus the Estonian Security Police was given the right to investigate cases on an individual basis. Police investigation files had all the elements of a legal inquiry, purporting impartiality and due process. In the wake of the Soviet mass deportation, the quest for justice in Estonia was genuine, but the execution thereof fundamentally iniquitous. The Estonian Security Police borrowed its methods from the Soviet NKVD. A certain percentage of the police and the Omakaitse rank-and-file had previously collaborated with Soviet authorities. And what could be a better way of proving one’s dedication to the nationalist cause than by punishing its enemies, real or imaginary! And so Jewish citizens of Estonia were arrested as “Jews” but condemned to death as “communists,” or at the very least as “individuals subversive to the current regime.” The profiles of the Jewish victims—over half of whom were women, children, and the elderly—alone demonstrate the absurdity of those allegations.

Otherwise, all sources indicate that the majority of Estonians attached little importance to the “Jewish Question” both before and during the war. An Estonian police official wrote in 1943 that the number of Jews was so low in Estonia that Estonians barely noticed them. Unlike in Nazi Germany, the “Jewish Question” had never been a priority in Estonia. Jews were not a problem. In short, people did not care.³⁴ The Estonian public paid no attention to the plight of the Jews. The Warsaw ghetto uprising was the only occurrence that was mentioned in private conversation. Even then, the rendering of the events of April–May 1943 was rather incomplete. People spoke of the fighting that erupted in Warsaw between the Poles and the Jews on the one side and the Germans on the other. The local population was up in arms against the Germans, who had created

³⁴ Estonian Security Police, Boris Meret’s report, “Axis: Anti-Comintern Pact. The Concept of National Territory,” March 11, 1943, ERA, R-64/1/202. See also: Argo Kuusik, “Die deutsche Vernichtungspolitik in Estland 1941–1944,” in *Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt bis zu Stalins Tod: Estland 1939–1953*, ed. Olaf Mertelsmann (Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 2005), 150.

unbearable conditions in the city.³⁵ The Estonian anti-German opposition barely commented on the Nazi policy of extermination. A flyer, titled *Võitlev Eestlane* (Fighting Estonian), from August 28, 1943, contained a vague reference to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. When discussing the Nazi terror, the flyer supplemented: “. . . We should add to that Jewish concentration camps.”³⁶ One month earlier, the head of the German civil administration in Estonia General Karl Litzmann received an anonymous letter that extolled Russia and severely criticized Germany. Judging by the contents, the author of the letter was an Estonian communist. Among other accusations, the anonymous author leveled the following: “They [the Germans] murder the Jews, rob the nations, and then live off their labor.”³⁷

Conclusion

The Estonian Security Police investigation files revealed an array of popular views on Jews. While the overall number of denunciations, including indirect informing, exceeded that of petitions in behalf of Jews, supportive testimonies prevailed over damaging ones by a factor of three. It is pure arithmetic to conclude that close to 75 percent of the ordinary Estonians whose names were mentioned in the investigation files were sympathetic to the Jewish plight. Among those who had betrayed Jews there were envious colleagues, xenophobic neighbors, and avaricious landlords. None of them knew much about Jews or had ever tried to understand them. Individuals who had interacted with Jews on an everyday basis, either at work or in personal settings, represented the opposite side of the spectrum. Finally, there were those who had received help from Jews and who now wanted to return the favor. However, not even the people who wished the Jews well were able to see beyond stereotypes. Still, they tried to vindicate a particular person they knew by contrasting him or her to the rest of the Jews. One or several of such testimonies could not shake the belief of the police that it was on the right track bringing an action against the Jews.

We will naturally never know the circumstances of witnesses' appearance in the sham courts. How were individuals summoned to appear be-

³⁵ German Security Police in Estonia, Dep. B-III, Biweekly report, May 25–27, 1943, ERA, R-64/1/21.

³⁶ Flyer, “*Võitlev Eestlane*,” August 28, 1943, ERA, R-64/1/828.

³⁷ Anonymous letter to Commissar General of Estonia Litzmann, July 1943, ERA, R-65/2/1.

fore the Crime Planning Commission and what was their initial reaction? How many police officials were present in a room during the questioning and did witnesses ever get to meet the “defendants”? Did Estonians who had been called to testify feel intimidated, pressured, or just relaxed? One other question is to what degree the policemen themselves believed in the due process they were supposedly safeguarding? By and large, ordinary people perceived the Estonian Security Police as essentially a national institution and therefore felt at ease giving straight answers, without being afraid of possible consequences. In other words, they spoke their mind. And what they had to say about the Jews under arrest was for the most part positive. The police did not mind as long as they were engaged in the role-play.

Although Estonia is in many respects an exceptional case and can hardly be representative for German-occupied Eastern Europe, the analysis of popular opinion vis-à-vis Jews in that particular country calls for a certain correction to the discourse on the role of society in advancing the Nazi policy of mass murder. The willingness of the Estonian Security Police to call in witnesses, whose testimonials they deliberately ignored, suggests a structural explanation of local collaboration in the Nazi “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” If a majority of ordinary Estonians were supportive of individual Jews they knew, and if the police acted rationally, without submitting themselves to the emotions of hatred and rage, then the answer lies somewhere else but in antisemitism.

CHAPTER 6

The End Complete: The Destruction of Jews in Provincial Cities

This chapter maps the destruction of the Estonian Jews outside the capital. Whether in Tallinn, Tartu, or any of the smaller cities, the identification, arrests, interrogations, and mass executions of Jews were essentially carried out by Estonian agencies under German orders. The Germans were watching as the Estonians were putting the condemned to death. As the case study of Tartu shows, executioners were not under any duress as there were enough volunteers to staff the firing squad. Some of them took a particular interest in the personal effects of the slain Jews. The preceding confiscation of Jewish property proved a complex undertaking involving several German agencies. While the German Security Police and the civil administration fought over Jewish real estate and significant book collections, Estonian institutions such as the University of Tartu also benefited from the loot. Individual Estonians who acquired minor items such as furniture or tableware from Jews were later reluctant to part with it.

Jews in Provincial Cities

The speed of the German conquest did not necessarily correlate with the pace of destruction in each of the major provincial Estonian cities. In some cities the last remaining Jews were executed as late as December 1941. Pechory in the southeast was one of the first Estonian provinces overrun by the Wehrmacht. Voldemar Kana, an officer of the former Estonian Army, headed a squad of the Pechory Omakaitse. In the course of a year, his commando murdered more than two hundred people in and around the city of Pechory. Among the victims was a Jewish family of five that was passing through Pechory on its way from Latvia. Kana, to-

gether with Leonhard Pindis, Osvald Pedask, and Rudolf Nüüd, executed the Jews behind the local Estonian Lutheran cemetery in late July 1941. The head of the family, whom Kana shot first, was said to have been a notorious communist. The murderers appropriated whatever effects the executed had; the local Omakaitse headquarters took their horse and cart.¹

In Paide, central Estonia, the arrests of Jews commenced immediately after German troops entered the city on August 8. Rebecca Judelovich, for example, was charged with political opposition to the new regime. Judelovich and Selma Saadma had been students at a local German high school; Saadma described her former classmate as a person who could not stand communists and who had socialized mainly with ethnic Germans. That was not enough, however, to secure Judelovich's release from Paide prison, from where on October 6 she was transferred to the Tallinn-Harju police prefecture.² In one of his reports, Paide prefect Vello Eelnurm described in detail how the local Omakaitse assisted the policemen in carrying out executions: each executioner was paired with a victim, whom he shot in the back of the head.³

The list of Jews arrested in the border city of Narva on the first day of the Nazi occupation (August 17) contained five names. Apprehended as "Jews," these five individuals were informed that they would be interned until the end of the war. However, the following day the four elderly people, aged between 71 and 81, were released. Executions did not commence until September 9, when Jacob Kagan and Georg Laserson were sentenced to death as communist sympathizers. The Security Police office in Narva covered a large territory, extending as far as Jõhvi, about 45 kilometers to the west. Benjamin Beilinson, a Jewish dentist from Jõhvi, was arrested on September 20. Not only did he team up with a political commissar (*politruk*) and an NKVD agent but also refused to part with his valuables. The death sentence for Beilinson was carried out on December 12.⁴ In mid-October the Narva police commissar appointed Ester Toubin

¹ Interrogations of Rudolf Nüüd, February 9 and June 19, 1968; Leonhard Pindis, February 13, 1968; Alexander Janson, March 13, 1968, Harald Plaado, April 10, 1968 (all in Tallinn), U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter: USHMM), RG-06.026/14.

² Rebecca Judelovich, ERA, R-52/2/18.

³ Estonian Security Police in Paide, Eelnurm to Estonian Security Police in Tallinn, Mere, December 1941, in *Pruun Katk: Saksa fašistlik okupatsioon Eestis 1941–1944. Dokumente ja materjale* [Brown plague: German fascist occupation of Estonia, 1941–1944], ed. Anni Matsulevitš (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1988), 138.

⁴ List of prisoners in Narva prison, August 28–30, 1941; Benjamin Beilinson, ERA, R-59/1/30.

as a Jewish Elder. Although Toubin had outlived all the other Narva Jews, he did not manage to survive. The Estonian Security Police decided to postpone Toubin's execution, originally scheduled for mid-December, until after his Jewish origin had been established.⁵ Olga Gorfinkel was one of the last remaining Jews in Narva. The seventy-one-year-old widow of a Narva rabbi died of natural causes in her apartment in the former synagogue on 12 Turu Street, which had by then been converted into a POW camp.⁶ The total number of Jews and (itinerant) Roma executed in Narva was thirty-one and seventeen respectively.⁷ Rakvere is the only city in Estonia for which the exact dates of execution of *all* local Jews are available. Four Jewish men were executed on August 18, that is, ten days after German troops captured Rakvere. The remaining eighteen people, both men and women, were shot on December 3.⁸

As elsewhere in Estonia, the population of Saaremaa Island welcomed the Germans jubilantly: the victorious troops received flowers and food; women put on their Sunday clothing; Estonian flags were raised. The grateful population shared information on communists in hiding.⁹ In the provincial capital of Kuressaare most Jews were executed between September 7 and 24, 1941. Several individuals were shot in October and November. The last Jewish victim on the island, physician Buras Lury, faced the firing squad on December 15. The Loode Forest, not far from the city, served as the execution site. As in Tallinn, executions were disguised as death due to natural causes. Notoriously, this deception only applied to Jews.¹⁰ The Haapsalu Security Police carried out executions around the same time in September. Rather unexpectedly, Rebecca Sule reportedly died in Pskov in December. As in Kuressaare, Jewish physicians were the last to go. A Haapsalu dentist Jacob Weiner "died" in Tallinn on October 14, 1942.¹¹ It might as well be that Berra Smoliansky was the only Jew

⁵ Estonian Security Police in Narva, October 21, 1941, ERA, R-59/1/25.

⁶ Vera Panova, "Metelitsa" [Blizzard], in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 4 (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1988), 67–70, 96, 102. Panova was the first author who produced a semi-fictional account that alluded to the murder of Jews in Estonia. Panova drafted this particular play in 1942.

⁷ Estonian Security Police in Narva, statistics through June 15, 1942, in *Pruun Katk*, 134.

⁸ Estonian Security Police in Rakvere, list of individuals sentenced in Rakvere, ERA, R-64/1/90. See also *Eesti rahvastikukaotused II/1: Saksa okupatsioon 1941–1944 / Population Losses in Estonia II/1: German Occupation, 1941–1944*, ed. Indrek Pavle (Tartu: Greif, 2002), 62, 73, 85, 87, 107, 193, 224, 243, 269.

⁹ Saaremaa Omakaitse, overview of activities through the end of 1941, ERA, R-358/1/11.

¹⁰ Estonian Security Police in Kuressaare to Registry Office, ERA, R-64/1/841.

¹¹ Estonian Security Police in Haapsalu to Registry Office, ERA, R-64/1/842.

that lived on Hiiumaa Island. On October 31, a local police constable detained a woman who worked as a nurse in a Soviet military hospital. Johannes Peeba told the investigation that Smoliansky, unlike other Jews, did not rush to make a career but continued working in her profession after June 1940. Smoliansky was executed the following month.¹²

Pärnu boasted the fourth largest Jewish community in Estonia. Located on the Baltic coast in the southwestern corner of Estonia, Pärnu had already become a zone of operations by mid-July. As a result, only half of the Jewish population managed to flee from the city. Pärnu Jews were herded into the so-called Betty Barn (a concentration camp for political prisoners cum Pärnu prison), which was administered by the local Omakaitse. The camp employed twenty-seven guards, in addition to fifty members of the Omakaitse. Mihkel Nõmm, deputy head of the Estonian Security Police in Pärnu, sanctioned the arrests, most of which took place in late July. The Jews were told that they would be released shortly after interrogation. None of them were prepared for long-term imprisonment; prohibited to take any personal belongings with them, many Jews had nothing but summer clothes. As the nights became colder, the inmates, women with small children in particular, endured significant hardship. On September 5, fifteen Jewish women pleaded with Pärnu police prefect to allow them to bring their warm clothes from home. The women had to address the police twice, for their first request was effectively ignored. By then they already knew that their homes were all but cleared. "Crying, we beg for your kindness. We are all Estonian born, we are loyal citizens and love our homeland dearly," wrote the women to the inspector of penitentiaries. Unexpectedly, on September 25 local headquarters permitted a small delivery of shoes and warm clothes to the concentration camp. The problem of food was just as acute. The daily ration for prisoners was Rbl. 2.00 per person, while the camp guards received Rbl. 6.84 worth of food. Ironically, it was the prisoners who prepared meals for the guards.¹³ By September, all male Jews in Pärnu had already been executed: twenty men on July 13 and another twenty on July 26. An Omakaitse guard who shot Eide Matskin dead on October 4 pleaded self-defense. The murder of

¹² Berra Smoliansky, ERA, R-56/3/46.

¹³ Pärnu prison composition, September 1, 1941; Petitions of Pärnu female Jews, September 5 and 18, 1941; Commandant of Pärnu concentration camp to head of Omakaitse, October 4, 1941; Inspector of Pärnu penitentiaries to head of Pärnu Police, September 25, 1941; Inspector of Pärnu penitentiaries to Commandant of Pärnu concentration camp, September 25, 1941; head of Pärnu Omakaitse to head of Omakaitse, September 11, 1941, ERA, R-932/1/1.

women and children did not commence until the final days of October, when they were taken from the camp to the local synagogue. Twenty-five women were then driven to the nearby Rae Forest and shot. Two days later, on November 2, the remaining sixty-two Jewish prisoners—all but fourteen children—were murdered right there in the synagogue.¹⁴ All that remained were patches of women's clothes and family pictures, strewn near the dumpster.¹⁵ Jewish women and children remained the last “political prisoners” in the Pärnu concentration camp when it was officially liquidated on October 30, 1941.¹⁶

The Estonian mayor of Pärnu later told Hermann Riecken, the newly appointed district commissar, what had happened to the local Jews: Estonian partisans killed the Jews in revenge for their alleged role in the mass deportation. Following the Soviet retreat, the Jews lived in constant fear, feeling threatened by the Estonians.¹⁷ There exists only limited data on the perpetrators at Pärnu. Martin Jüris was twenty-six when he assumed the position of director of Pärnu prison. Jüris was born in Pärnu, finished elementary and high school there. In 1939 he graduated from the Tartu University Law School, and a year later *cum laude* from the Military College. During the Soviet occupation Jüris reportedly worked as an accountant.¹⁸ Executions were indeed carried out by a special Omakaitse squad under the command of Captain Villem Raid, former head of the border guard at Mõisaküla. According to witnesses, Raid used to refer to executions as “playing soccer.” The routine procedure began in the morning at Omakaitse headquarters, where the men from the firing squad received their weapons and ammunition. At some point, the head of the Estonian Security Police in Pärnu, Captain August Orgussaar, and his German counterpart joined the group. From the Betty Barn, buses and trucks loaded with Jews drove to the Rae Forest, about 12 kilometers away from the city. High-ranking officials usually followed the cavalcade in a car. Upon arrival, Jews were lined up along the pit; the firing squad took position on the other side of the pit. The last image that the victims saw was

¹⁴ List of Jews executed in Pärnu, January 16, 1942, in Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 204–206, 227, 230.

¹⁵ Interrogation of Konstantin Lehe, Tallinn, October 19, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/12.

¹⁶ Head of Pärnu Omakaitse, Order no. 30, October 31, 1941, ERA, R-207/1/3

¹⁷ Interrogation of Hermann Riecken, Bergedorf, May 1948, German Federal Archives in Koblenz, Z-42 III/1732.

¹⁸ Martin Jüris, application in the name of Pärnu City Mayor, September 1, 1941, ERA, R-932/1/1.

the calming picture of a sea and slim pine trees graciously swaying in the breeze. The Estonians shot, while the Germans snapped pictures.¹⁹

Out of the 137 Jews executed in Pärnu, at least eighteen came from Latvia. Another twelve Latvian Jews, including several members of a shock battalion, were executed elsewhere in southern Estonia in August and September.²⁰ The wanted list that the Estonian Security Police in Tartu distributed included the names of several Latvian Jews.²¹

Jews in Tartu

The random murder of Jews occurred more frequently in Tartu than anywhere else in Estonia during the summer months of 1941. As far as the morbid statistics of executed Jews is concerned, Tartu claimed the second largest number of victims in Estonia after Tallinn—probably as many as 158.²² The first roundups were aimed at cleansing the city of suspected arsonists. Heavy shelling by Soviet cannons wrecked havoc on the wooden quarters of the city. It was estimated that about 12 percent of the housing in Tartu had thus been destroyed.²³ On July 13, the Omakaitse commander in South Estonia, Friedrich Kurg, with the approval of Tartu commandant Hans Gosebruch, ordered all Tartu Jews confined to a just-established concentration camp. Unable to find any viable pretext for arrest, Kurg referred to “Jews-arsonists,” including “children with Molotov-cocktails.”²⁴ That went well with the German field headquarters, which had identified the Omakaitse as a spearhead of the cleansing operations in the city of Tartu.²⁵

Among the available files of the Estonian Security Police in Tartu only twelve belonged to Jews. These twelve persons were executed between

¹⁹ *Sirp ja Vasar*, September 13, 1963; interrogation of Karl Leetsi, Pärnu, April 3, 1950, ERAF, 129SM/1/23788.

²⁰ *Eesti rahvastiku kaotused / Population Losses in Estonia*, 72, 73, 77, 88, 89, 92, 97, 106, 118, 144, 160, 209, 244, 311–16.

²¹ Estonian Security Police in Tartu, wanted list, February 20, 1942, ERA, R-62/1/24.

²² It is possible that some Tartu Jews made it as far as Tallinn, where they were later arrested and executed.

²³ Herbert Lindmäe, *Suvesõda Tartumaal 1941* [Summer war in Tartu province, 1941] (Tartu: self-published, 1999), 205, 209–11, 225, 326–27.

²⁴ Tartumaa Omakaitse, overview of activities through the end of 1941, ERA, R-358/1/17.

²⁵ German 18th Army High Command, August 2, 1941, German Federal Archives-Military Archives in Freiburg, RH-20 18/99.

July 20 and August 16 on various counts. Four men were shot for either violating “discipline” or failing to report to work; four others were sentenced to death for being a communist, a member of a shock battalion, and NKVD agents respectively; while the rest had to die simply because of their ethnicity.²⁶ The charges against Isaak Mogilkin were equal to a death sentence: collaboration with the NKVD and assistance in deporting an Estonian man. Mogilkin and Peeter Helk both owned clothing stores in a shopping strip on Fortuna Street. During his interrogation in the NKVD local headquarters back in 1940, Helk spotted Mogilkin in the same building. Described as an Estonian nationalist and anticommunist, Helk had allegedly warned his wife that if he was ever to be arrested, it would be because of Mogilkin. The latter denied any association with the NKVD, except that he had also been questioned on numerous occasions, mainly about his and other Jews’ gold.²⁷ Late at night on August 1, 1941, a Tartu police constable received two visitors. Thirty-five-year-old Omakaitse member Eduard Hilpur brought seventy-seven-year-old Moses Kaplan to the prefecture. According to Hilpur, he learned from somebody that one of the inhabitants at 10 Aida Street was a Jew, whom he then immediately apprehended. Hilpur took his civic duty seriously, as he locked Kaplan’s apartment and delivered the keys to the police. Three days later, Kaplan was already in Tartu concentration camp, where Captain Juhan Jüriste assigned him to the so-called Special Department. Kaplan was executed one day later.²⁸ Occasionally, the Germans also conducted arrests. For example, on August 9 Wehrmacht soldiers arrested tannery owner Susman Trapido at his home. Sixty-eight-year-old Trapido was only able to live for two more days after that. As of September 19, 1941, the total number of executed in Tartu reached 405, including fifty Jews. According to the German Security Police, by that date there were no more Jews under arrest in Tartu.²⁹ All local Jews had at one point or another gone through Tartu concentration camp.

Tartu concentration camp was established on the former exhibition grounds on Näituse Street. The exhibition grounds served as an original assembly point for Estonian anti-Soviet partisans. That is where the Tartu

²⁶ *Eesti rahvastiku kaotused / Population Losses in Estonia*, 67, 73, 87, 95, 105, 118, 186, 236, 249, 280.

²⁷ Isaac Mogilkin, ERA, R-60/2/200.

²⁸ Moses Kaplan, ERA, R-60/2/139; interrogation of Eduard Hilpus, Tartu, January 23, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

²⁹ Einsatzgruppen report no. 88, September 19, 1941, German Federal Archives in Berlin (hereafter: BAB), R-58/217.

Omakaitse was born. Four large sixty-by-twenty-meter pavilions that used to exhibit the best of Estonian produce now housed prisoners. Men and women, criminal and “political” offenders, were kept in separate barracks. Each barracks individually, and the camp territory as a whole, were enclosed with a barbed-wire fence. Former storage barracks (popularly known as the “barracks of the doomed”) served as the last stop for those condemned to death. Once prisoners entered the barracks, they never came back.³⁰

Two small houses within the perimeter of the camp were occupied by the camp administration and Special Department of the Omakaitse Commandant’s Office, or simply Special Department. The head of the Special Department was Roland Lepik, a guerilla fighter from Ahja. Together with Lepik in the Special Department worked several former police officers, including Ervin Viks, Evald Mikson, Valentine Keder, and Alexander Koolmeister. The function of the Special Department was to investigate the circumstances of the individual offenders. Sometimes the Special Department received guests from the Estonian Security Police, who also participated in the interrogations. During the interrogations, department officials often abused prisoners both verbally and physically. No formal records of investigation were kept; the death penalty and indeterminate imprisonment were the only two verdicts the Special Department ever pronounced.³¹ As with the Estonian Security Police branch offices throughout the country, the Special Department in Tartu forwarded summaries of decisions to the German Security Police. A proposal of capital punishment, which often accompanied the list of prisoners, was customarily approved.³²

One of the Tartu concentration camp top officials was Juhan Jüriste. As did tens of thousands of other Estonians, Jüriste had his German last name changed into an Estonian-sounding one. Jüriste was a professional military officer, having served first in the Tsarist Army, then in the Estonian Army, and finally in the Red Army. Jüriste held membership in the War Veterans’ League (Vabs), which he quit in March 1934. Jüriste had earlier been removed from the list of active members of Kaitseliit for not paying his dues. On January 1, 1941, Jüriste was transferred to the reserve. For a while he was working in a hydroelectric power station, until

³⁰ Interrogation of Voldemar Rajaloo, Tartu, April 27, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³¹ Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, February 23 and 27, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³² Interrogation of Voldemar Rajaloo, Tartu, April 27, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

he got a job in the Tartu municipality. Jüriste became a typical Soviet bureaucrat, working in the department responsible for the allocation of housing. During the July interregnum, Major Kurg approached Jüriste on the matter of joining the Omakaitse. Jüriste accepted the offer, thus replacing Tartu University professor Julius Mark as commander of one of the two original Omakaitse companies in Tartu. Yet the prospect of fighting at the front did not excite Jüriste, who managed to stay in the city while pleading indisposition. On July 16, Kurg appointed Jüriste commandant of Tartu concentration camp, which came into existence a few days earlier on the initiative of the Estonian partisans. Kurg explained to Jüriste that the people the latter was about to see in the camp had been arrested on political charges, that is, those who sided with the Soviets.³³ Jüriste assumed his responsibilities as camp commandant on July 21, while the Soviet troops were still holding onto their positions on the right bank of the Emajõgi River.

Jüriste was neither intellectually gifted nor well educated. Although Jüriste could at times be rude to his subordinates, sadist he definitely was not. Guards tried to stay away from Jüriste, particularly when he was drunk. As a former officer, he expected the guards to obey their commander as well as the service regulations of the Estonian Army. Indeed, Jüriste valued discipline above all; he frequently checked the posts around the camp several times a night. This and other initiatives by Jüriste took a toll on his health; because of his bad foot he used cane. Even then, one could see Jüriste's military bearing.³⁴ It was his military background that made Jüriste believe that, by accepting the position of camp commandant, he fulfilled his obligation to the homeland. Among his subordinates, Jüriste had a reputation as a haughty, hot-tempered, and vicious person.³⁵ Sometime in the late fall of 1941, Jüriste and his wife received a new apartment on 23 Õnne Street. Quite "new" it was not: the apartment belonged to a Jewish couple that had been executed.³⁶ About the same time, one of Jüriste's subordinates delivered two suitcases with the personal effects of the murdered Jews to his apartment.³⁷

³³ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, November 30, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³⁴ Interrogation of Harald Kolberg, March 31, 1961; Arnold Looman, March 25, 1961 (both in Tartu), USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³⁵ Interrogation of Aksel Piir, Tartu, March 28, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³⁶ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, December 2, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11. Ironically, the street name, Õnne, means "happiness" in Estonian.

³⁷ Interrogation of Alexander Kroon, Tallinn, March 14, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

Jüriste had under his command sixty guards and three officers on duty: Karl Linnas, Elmar Ardla, and Alexander Laak. The number of guards correlated with that of prisoners, at one point reaching one hundred. The guards were hired on an individual basis. Those who wished to become camp guards came for an interview with Jüriste. If Jüriste found the candidate suitable for the job, he recommended that man to Lepik, who then made the final decision. As the main criterion for selection, Jüriste identified formal military training.³⁸ On August 1, Lepik replaced Jüriste as camp commandant, while continuing to serve as head of the Special Department. Lepik's superiors expressed their appreciation of his work in Tartu by promoting him to the position of head of Department B-IV of the Estonian Security Police in Tallinn. Upon Lepik's recommendation, Linnas became the next commandant of the Tartu concentration camp. Linnas served in this position from September 1941 to May 1942. Jüriste, meanwhile, switched to supervising the guards.

In late fall 1941, an Omakaitse detachment that had been guarding Tartu concentration camp was incorporated into the XXXIII police battalion. Most men cited material benefits as the main reason for joining the camp guard: either salary or extra food rations; none of the former guards evoked ideology as a prime incentive. Some people chose to work at a concentration camp to avoid going to the front. Sometimes the decision to join the camp personnel came out of the desire to forestall unnecessary questions about one's own past or even potential blackmailing. That was a concern to Osvald Mets, whose brother was sentenced to death for participating in the abortive Communist putsch of 1924.³⁹ News about the employment opportunity spread by word of mouth; a commanding officer also sometimes brought in people he knew. More often, however, a guard that had already been hired recommended his friend for a job. The criterion for selection was past service in the police, the military, or the Kaitseliit.

On August 27, the camp was moved to a new location, the former military barracks known as Kuperianov Barracks. These barracks were built during the First World War as a military hospital. The reason for the move was simple: the pavilions on the exhibition grounds had no heat and therefore could not be used during the winter. The new camp was essentially located on the same street, close to downtown Tartu and the train station. Partially built by prisoners themselves, the camp had the same layout as

³⁸ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, February 21, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

³⁹ Interrogation of Osvald Mets, Tartu, December 27, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

the old one, that is, two barracks for the inmates and one for the Special Department. The bigger of the two barracks accommodated less dangerous offenders—women on one side and men on the other. A guard post outside of the barracks was supposed to dissuade prisoners from peeping through the windows, which had barbed wire instead of glass. A kitchen and a room for Fritz Giesen, the field headquarters commissioner who regularly came for inspections, flanked the building. The barracks for individuals condemned to death had not only a different name—Barracks no. 5—but also a different interior. Originally built as a lockup for insubordinate soldiers, the Fifth Barracks was ideal for its purposes: individual cells, guard posts inside and outside of the building, and impenetrable barbed-wire fence along the perimeter. Located next to the barracks was storage for prisoners' personal effects. Due to a lack of space, the Special Department was later relocated to Kastani Street, about forty-five meters away from the camp. The combination of a wooden fence and barbed wire was used to separate the Kuperianov Barracks from the outside world. Here and there were installed watchtowers, equipped with machineguns. Jüriste and Linnas supervised the construction and the subsequent move.⁴⁰ At different times, Tartu concentration camp had between four hundred and eight hundred prisoners (at the height of its activity one and a half thousand).

The camp, originally under the field headquarters' command, was later taken over by the German Security Police (which was located only a few blocks away on 85 Riga Avenue). On a daily basis, however, it was essentially the Estonian Security Police and Tartu prefect Victor Roovere that ran the camp. According to Rosalie Eres, who worked as an interpreter in the Tartu concentration camp, the bulk of paperwork in the camp was in Estonian. Only infrequently did camp administration receive guidelines from the German Security Police, Eres insisted.⁴¹ The Germans who the prisoners encountered while performing labor outside of the camp territory usually stressed that they had nothing to do with the Tartu concentration camp, meaning the Estonians took control into their own hands.⁴² Except for Giesen, no Germans were present at executions. All the thousands of people who perished in Tartu died at the hands of the Estonians.

⁴⁰ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, December 13, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴¹ Interrogation of Rosalie Eres, Tallinn, February 2, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴² Testimony of Jenny Nõu, Tartu, December 23, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

Mass Executions at Tartu Concentration Camp

Prisoners arrived at the concentration camp from different locations: the prison, the police department, or from outside Tartu. The guards that delivered prisoners brought a covering letter that identified the barracks in which the latter should be committed. In the case of Jews, it was usually the Germans who brought them. Jews were initially assigned to the barracks for non-political prisoners. Very soon, however, Lepik ordered Jews locked in the barracks for those condemned to death. The Special Department officials, who wore civilian clothes, regularly fetched prisoners from that barracks for investigation. Anyone who went through that procedure was a sure candidate for execution.⁴³ Particularly in the beginning, a prisoner who arrived in the morning was often executed in the evening, and by nighttime one of the guards was already wearing his clothes.

Mass executions were usually carried out during the evening hours. At any single time, between fifteen and twenty-five prisoners lost their lives. One could anticipate an execution every time the commanding staff made their appearance on the campgrounds. (In a futile attempt to stamp out awareness of what was going on, prior to each execution, prisoners in the barracks were ordered to lie down on the floor.) The executions were usually supervised by Commandant Linnas, his deputy Harry Koppel, head of the investigation unit of the Special Department Keder, and the field headquarters commissioner Giesen. Otherwise, every officer at Tartu concentration camp, particularly those from the Special Department, at one time or another participated in the executions. Two trucks stopped in front of the Fifth Barracks. As Lepik (when he was commandant) was reading aloud the names off the list, a guard went inside the barracks to fetch the victims. Those individuals condemned to death, in pairs, were stripped of their clothes down to their underwear, and their hands tied behind their back. (Following the escape of a prisoner, all the condemned were customarily tied with rope to each other.) Each prisoner was assigned a guard, who then all climbed into the first truck. Members of the Omakaiste to be posted around the execution site boarded the second truck. Sometimes, guards were already drunk before the execution. Former prisoners recalled the eerie sound of the songs that the drunken guards bawled while leaving for the execution site. The guards who stayed in the camp did not miss their chance to misappropriate at least some of

⁴³ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, December 12, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

the clothes that the condemned left behind. Trying to snatch the best items inevitably led to fights among the guards.⁴⁴

After a short while, buses replaced trucks as a means of transportation of the condemned to the execution site. There were two such buses—a small REO and a big GMC—both bright red. These were unusual buses; without seats but with benches along the sides, they had previously been used for transporting fish. Elmar Kink drove the REO, while Herbert Tamm was the GMC bus driver.⁴⁵ On occasion, Tartu concentration camp made requests to the local bus depot. The buses headed to the so-called Jalaka Line, an anti-tank ditch about 5 kilometers southwest of Tartu. Following the outbreak of the Russo-German war, Soviet military authorities ordered the local population to build defenses against the advancing German troops. They chose the village of Lemmatsi as the site for a huge anti-tank ditch. The trench, which ran across the Tartu-Riga highway, was surrounded by farmsteads, some of them a mere fifty meters away. Farmers knew all too well what was going on at the trench at night. Prohibited from leaving their homes during the executions, farmers got used to the sound of gunshots, which were often interrupted by screams of terror. Sometimes they heard guards singing popular Estonian songs such as *Eestimaa, mu isamaa* (Estonia, my homeland) and *Metsa läksid sa ja metsa läksin ma* (You went to the forest and so did I).⁴⁶

There were no fixed days for executions, which were carried out as often as twice a day in July and August, and twice a week thereafter. Generally, the Fifth Barracks was emptied as quickly as it was filled. While the concentration camp was still at the exhibition grounds, it was either Lepik or Koolmeister who assembled a firing squad. Later, at the Kuperianov Barracks, this responsibility fell on Elmar Ardla, one of the three officers on duty. Ardla commanded the platoon from which executioners were drawn. At roll call, Ardla customarily enquired if anybody wanted to volunteer for execution duty. The volunteers were then assembled in a special firing squad.⁴⁷ Those persons were usually off-duty guards. Sometimes there were more volunteers than needed, which ruled out the probability

⁴⁴ Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, December 6, 1952, USHMM, RG-06.026/5; interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, December 12, 1960; testimony of Irene Reinhold, Pärnu, April 20, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴⁵ Interrogation of Herbert Hinzer, April 7, 1961; interrogation of Johannes Melder, April 27, 1961 (both in Tartu), USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴⁶ Testimonies of Salme Rull and Lilly Lööke, Tartu, April 19, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴⁷ Interrogation of Elmar Ardla, Tallinn, December 10, 1945, USHMM, RG-06.026/5.

that anyone was forced to participate in execution against his will.⁴⁸ Thus Jüriste honored the request of one of the guards, who asked to be relieved due to heart disease. "Alright," the guard commander said, "if you are such a coward, I will not assign you to the firing squad."⁴⁹ One of the executioners, Hans Laats, later explained that "only those participated in executions who wanted to. Those who did not express such a desire were not even asked to participate." Among the volunteers there found several eighteen-year-olds.⁵⁰ Some of the guards became almost permanent members of the firing squad, volunteering whenever they had time. The guards were further induced to participate on the promise of the meager possessions of the executed as well as additional vodka allowances.⁵¹ Giesen made sure that executioners had enough alcohol, of which he consumed a substantial amount himself. The guards appreciated Giesen bringing milk cans with spirits and beer into the camp. During his visits to the camp, Giesen behaved as if he was the boss, making the rounds and punching prisoners. Reportedly, Giesen lived in a four-bedroom apartment, lavishly decorated with furniture confiscated from Jews.⁵²

The list of executioners at Tartu concentration camp is long: Arnold Eelmets, Evald Eelmets, Karl Elk, Herman Ehrlich, Voldemar Jakobson, Osvald Kahur, Victor Kaur, Johannes Käärik, Valter Kerro, Nikolai Kiima, Arvo Kivijarv, Alfred Kolberg, Alexander Kroon, August Feliks Kroon, Alfred Kukk, Udo Kuppar, Jaan Kübar, Alfons Kūlaots, Ilmar Kütt, Edgar Laabent, Hans Laats, Karl Laurits, Agu Leetmaa, Olav Linde, Herbert Luha, Johannes Luhasaar, Endel Mark, Endel Matto, Johannes Pennar, Herbert Ratnik, Alexander Sägi, Paul Sepp, Ernst Suits, Enn Sügis, Villem Talvik, Robert Taska, Elmar Trossek, Alfred Tõnismaa, Elmar Unt, Alexander Vaht.⁵³ Prisoners were forced to kneel facing the

⁴⁸ Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, March 2, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁴⁹ Interrogation of Harald Kolberg, Tartu, March 31, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵⁰ Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, February 24, 1961; testimony of Hans Laats at Jüriste-Linnas-Viks trial, Tartu, January 16, 1962, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵¹ Confrontation between Jüriste and Laats, Tallinn, March 4, 1961; interrogation of Osvald Mets, Tartu, December 27, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵² Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, February 22, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵³ Interrogation of Hans Laats, December 10, 1952, USHMM, RG-06.026/5; interrogation of Karl Elk, April 5, 1961; interrogation of Harald Kolberg, October 29, 1960; interrogation of Manivald Muuli, April 3, 1961 (all in Tartu); testimony of Irene Reinhold, Pärnu, April 20, 1961; excerpts from various investigation files, USHMM, RG-06.026/11; interrogation of Herman Ehrlich, March 3 and 10, 1948; interrogation of Evald Eelmets (both in Tartu), March 10, 1948, ERAF, 1243/I. Some of the defendants who received prison sentences in the late 1940s later argued that the investigative officers forced them to confess to crimes

trench. Immediately before the execution, Leppik (and later Linnas) announced the verdict: on account of the crimes committed against the regime, the arrestees were being sentenced to death. Each victim was paired with an executioner, who took position directly behind the former. Koolmeister, and on occasion Jüriste, usually gave the firing order. Inevitably, there were several misses. One of the officers—Linnas, Laats, Koolmeister, Ardla, Jüriste, Koppel, or Giesen—then came to the edge of the pit and delivered “mercy” shots. Koppel, Aardla, and Linnas belonged to the same fraternity and thus were referred to as the “Viroonia trio.” The camp guards buried the bodies, received their share of alcohol, and left.⁵⁴

For the majority of Tartu Jews, the concentration camp was only a short stop on their way to death. Initially, Jews were herded into the synagogue on Turu Street. Then, however, the military authorities decided to start using the synagogue as a makeshift POW camp. Jews in their turn were moved into two different buildings on Alexandri and Pargi Street (a detention facility on 9 Pargi Street came to be known as the “Jewish camp”). From there, one family after another, Jews were taken to the concentration camp. It was a matter of days before they were all executed. Upon the question as to what was going to happen to them next, Jews received a prompt answer—they were about to be taken to Riga. The only difference between the execution of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners was that in the former case no lists were drawn up. Koppel supervised more executions of Jews than anybody else, not least because he was eager to get their valuables.⁵⁵

The first known mass execution of Jews took place on July 15 or 16 and claimed the lives of fifty men, women, and children.⁵⁶ In late October another group of Jews was delivered to the Tartu concentration camp. There were between twenty and thirty people in that group, mainly women of different ages, as well as three children. The execution order was in place within a few days. Under the pretext of taking the Jews to a bath, the guards forced the women and children out of the Fifth Barracks

they had never committed. Circumstantial evidence, as well as the testimonies collected in the 1960s, however, for the most part corroborate earlier findings.

⁵⁴ To get cigarettes and vodka was a big deal; some of the perpetrators bitterly remarked that the officers had always had plenty of alcohol on their table.

⁵⁵ Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, February 27, 1961; testimony of Mikhail Afanasiev, Tartu, March 24, 1961; Interrogation of Juhan Jüriste, Tallinn, November 30, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵⁶ Interrogation of August Malts, Tartu, March 29, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

and ordered them to undress. Those who refused were stripped by force. In the beginning the prisoners remained calm, but once they realized what was going on they started crying (the children also). That did nothing to the guards, who were busy tying the victims' hands with rope. Once finished, they shoved the Jews into a bus with curtained windows; the condemned crouched on the floor, while the guards sat. Two of three guards climbed onto the roof of the bus. Linnas, Koppel, Laats, Ardla, and Giesen—all the officers—followed the bus in a car all the way along Riga Avenue, then left. The bus stopped next to the Jalaka ditch. Koppel was in charge. He ordered the women off the bus, some of whom obeyed while others were violently thrown to the ground. One of the women, twenty-eight-year-old Tartu native Golde S., was completely naked; one of the guards, Udo Kuppar, raped her on the way to the execution site. On their knees, facing the trench, the victims heard Koppel's announcement that as Jews they were to be exterminated and hence the execution. Once the firing squad did its job, Koppel finished off those women who showed signs of life.⁵⁷ Karl Elk personally knew the Mirvitz family, who ran a china shop in downtown Tartu. And here he was, sitting on a bus next to twelve-year-old David, eleven-year-old Eugene, and eight-year-old Lilian, while their mother, Mia Mirvitz, walked to her death. Because Mia Mirvitz was an ethnic German, she was given a choice to leave her children and thus survive, but she refused. It was then their turn: Endel Mark led the children by hand to the edge of the pit. Lilian became unruly, constantly asking about her mother. "Here," Mark showed the girl the corpse of her mother in the bottom of the pit. Next, from a short distance, he shot Lilian in the head.⁵⁸ One of the Jews among the executed wore a distinctive gray overcoat; a guard later asked the camp tailor to alter that coat so as to fit his figure.⁵⁹

The snow was already on the ground when Elmar Puusepp, a Tartu concentration camp prisoner, received his next assignment—to saw firewood for one of the homeowners on Alexandri Street. While doing his work, Puusepp saw a red bus pulling in front of the former Jewish school across the street. Karl Linnas, the then Tartu concentration camp com-

⁵⁷ Interrogation of Olav Karikosk, January 13, 1961; interrogation of Alexander Kroon, March 15, 1961 (both in Tallinn), USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁵⁸ Interrogation of Karl Elk, April 5, 1961; confrontation between Jüriste and Elk, April 5, 1961 (both in Tartu); interrogation of Ingrid Aksel, Tallinn, January 9, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11. See also *Eesti rahvastikukaotused / Population Losses in Estonia*, 183.

⁵⁹ Testimony of August Tõnismäe, Tartu, March 30, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

mandant, addressed men, women, and children as they were leaving the school building. Linnas explained to Jews that they were going to Riga and therefore had to take all their belongings with them. Linnas said the same thing to a little girl with a life-size doll, whom he helped onto the bus. Having finished his work, Puusepp returned to the camp. The bus he saw in the morning was already there, yet empty; one of the guards had the doll.⁶⁰ Oskar Art was the bus driver who took the Jews—twenty adults and five children—first to the concentration camp and then to the Jalaka ditch. The adults, their hands tied with rope, were executed first, followed by the children.⁶¹ Sometimes small children were executed separately from their parents. Hans Laats recalled one such case when up to ten children between three and fifteen years of age were murdered. According to Laats, Koppel shot the youngest of the children in the head while holding them by the leg. What was left of the tiny bodies, Koppel threw into the pit.⁶² This time the guards received beer instead of vodka.

To conceal the extent of the murder, later on in the war the Germans started exhuming and burning the bodies of the victims executed during the first years of the occupation. Especially for that purpose, in 1943 the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) created the so-called Sonderkommando 1005 (also known as Blobel Kommando). The actual exhumation was done by Jewish prisoners.⁶³ In November 1943 some eighty Jews arrived to Tartu concentration camp from Tallinn central prison. The Jews looked miserable: emaciated, they had been denied a bath for months. The exhumations commenced in December and lasted until April of the following year. Although the gruesome work at the Jalaka anti-tank ditch were an open secret, the Germans tried, at least symbolically, to prevent the public from learning about the scope of the operation. As Jewish prisoners moved along the pit, they enclosed the immediate work area with a tall fence. The Germans filmed them working. The suffocating smoke of the burning flesh clogged the air for weeks, disturbing the city dwellers. “The communists are burning,” one of the guards, Karl Eelmets, explained to the camp inmates. Over a period of four months, most of the Jewish workers perished. Being tied to each other with rope, suffering from cold and malnutrition, only twenty-two people were still alive in

⁶⁰ Testimony of Elmar Puusepp, Tartu, April 5, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁶¹ Interrogation of Oskar Art, Tartu, November 1, 1960, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁶² Interrogation of Hans Laats, Tallinn, February 27, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁶³ *House of the Wannsee Conference: Permanent Exhibit. Guide and Reader*, ed. Gerhard Schoenberger (Berlin: Hentrich, 2000), 128–29.

April. As the last corpses went up in flames, the German guards from Sonderkommando 1005 herded the remaining Jews into a nearby sauna, sealed the door and the windows, and then set it on fire. Local Estonian farmers were the only ones to tell the story.⁶⁴ Only ashes remained of more than three and a half thousand people that had been executed in Tartu between 1941 and 1944.⁶⁵

Jews of Mixed Origin

Whatever difficulties the Estonian Security Police had pinning crimes on what the Nazis called “full-blooded Jews,” it turned out to be even harder in the case of Jews from mixed families. Several Jews among those executed had non-Jewish wives. The fact that somebody’s partner was Estonian or German did not safeguard against arrest. At most, it could postpone it for a few days, as happened to Arkady Lury. While conducting a search in Dr. Salomon Lury’s apartment on September 1, the Omakaitse refrained from detaining his son, Arkady, simply because he had an Estonian wife. However, they came back two days later, this time looking for him. There was nothing that could save Salomon Epstein from imminent death. However, a concerted effort by his colleagues and his German wife made the Estonian Security Police change the execution order for Epstein to one of internment in a concentration camp for an indefinite period. Born in East Prussia, Helene Epstein (Tomantat) made a good impression on the German Security Police: she ran one of the best men’s fashion stores in Tallinn; two of her brothers served in the Wehrmacht; her son had been deported to Russia. Helen Epstein said she pleaded on behalf of Salomon Epstein because he was her husband and because he was of great help to the family. At one point, the police arrested the entire family of Josef Rubanovich, including his Russian wife Vera and their daughter Kira. Vera’s sister appealed to the Estonian civil administration to have her released from Harku prison camp because “she was not Jewish and

⁶⁴ Records of the Estonian SSR’s Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes, Tartumaa and Tartu, fall 1944, USHMM, RG-22.002M/25; testimony of Irene Reinhold, Pärnu, April 20, 1961; testimony of August Koort, Tartu, April 26, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁶⁵ Riho Västriku, “Tartu koonduslaager” [Tartu concentration camp], *Ajalooline Ajakiri* 3/4 (1999): 78–80. As a result of a painstaking analysis of available sources, Västriku came to the conclusion that the official Soviet figure of 12,000 executed—is grossly exaggerated.

had no other faults.”⁶⁶ Apparently, Vera Rubanovich was released, because on April 28, 1944, she was arrested again. The cause for arrest was formulated as follows: “an ethnic Russian who was married to a Jew.” Simultaneously with Vera Rubanovich, her daughter Kira was also arrested. The charges were the same, except that Kira had divorced her Jewish husband in 1938.⁶⁷

“Aryan” wives now and then sought information about their Jewish husbands. Some women tried to find comfort in their loved one’s death, while the others sought to go on with their life. Two German women—Anna Bertha Kliachko (Lüdtke) and Margaret Mirwitz (Krones)—were issued the death certificates of their husbands who “died” in Tallinn central prison and Harku prison camp respectively. In both cases the word “executed” was crossed out and “died” written above it. The circumstances of Konstantin Mirwitz’s “death” involved dark irony. The fact that Mirwitz was a Lutheran and also a member of the German Cultural Council left the police with only one option—to evoke his Jewishness. Having established that Mirwitz was born Jewish, the police dispatched him to prison so that “he would not be able to evade trial and punishment.” Notoriously, the German Security Police cared much less about nuances than their Estonian counterparts and tended to reveal the true cause of death to the relatives of the murdered Jews. Elias Elian was executed on September 19, 1941. Five days later, Elian’s wife Elisabeth (apparently German) requested from Sandberger, the commander of the German Security Police in Estonia, information about her husband. She wanted to know if her husband was Jewish and whether he was still alive. Elisabeth Elian explained that she needed that data to file for divorce. The Estonian Security Police intended to write off the Elias Elian’s case as death from “natural causes,” but was overruled by Sandberger, who urged the police to tell the woman that her husband was executed for being a full Jew. With Anna Scher, the Estonian Security Police interacted without any mediation: the woman was told that her husband Mikhail had “died.” Meta Ulrike Katz (Kirnmann) was Estonian and therefore approached the B-IV Department. The nature of Meta Katz’s request was similar to that of Elisabeth Elian’s: she wanted a divorce from her husband, Salomon Katz, in case he was still alive. She might even be able to do so because Salomon Katz was not executed

⁶⁶ Salomon Lury, ERA, R-64/4/432; Salomon Epstein, ERA, R-64/4/185; Vera Rubanovich, ERA, R-64/4/711.

⁶⁷ Case files, ERA, R-64/1/172.

until a week later, on October 4. Elfrieda Rogovsky waited until the following June to enquire whether her Jewish husband had “by any chance” died by then, so that she could divorce him posthumously. It did not seem to be a problem since Aron Rogovsky had already been executed on September 5, 1941.⁶⁸

Jewish women from mixed marriages, like female Jews in general, survived the first few months of Nazi occupation. The wife and son of Victor Alaots were arrested in Tartu on November 11. Following the arrest of his wife, Victor Alaots received a summons to report to the local Security Police office. A police official strongly recommended Alaots to divorce his wife, as well as to refrain from any subversive activities against the new regime. For a month or so, Riva Alaots and her child were locked in a Jewish school on Aleksandri Street. During that time the head of the family regularly visited the school, bringing milk for his son. He saw Jewish women and children in the school but no men, who by that time had already been executed. In December, Victor Alaots was reunited with his son, who did not qualify as a “thoroughbred” Jew. Riva Alaots never returned.⁶⁹

Jews of mixed origin, the so-called *Mischlinge*, had never been numerous in Estonia and, therefore did not warrant special legislation. By mid-1942 there were about 250 such people in Latvia and between ten and twenty in Estonia. The head of the German civil administration in Estonia, Hinrich Lohse, recommended treating those Jews as *Mischlinge* of the first grade, in accordance with the classification adopted in Nazi Germany.⁷⁰ Tamara Köhler was born in 1924 into a mixed family. Her Jewish mother evacuated to Russia proper but her Estonian father stayed in Narva. Tamara herself was registered as “German,” which seemed to be all right with the Estonian Security Police.⁷¹ In November 1943 the German Security Police in the Ostland ordered Jews to be stripped of their identity documents. As everybody knew, by then all Jews in Estonia had already been locked up in camps. Nevertheless, the regulation regarding IDs also applied to “half-Jews” and “three-quarter-Jews.” For the first time ever, the document mentioned Karaims, who were not to be treated

⁶⁸ Kalman Kliachko, ERA, R-64/4/284; Elias Elian, ERA, R-64/4/212; Mikhail Scher, ERA, R-64/4/914; Salomon Katz, ERA, R-64/4/370; Aron Rogovsky, ERA, R-64/4/1137.

⁶⁹ Testimony of Victor Alaots, Tartu, April 7, 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026/11.

⁷⁰ Reich commissioner for the Ostland Lohse, note, June 21, 1942, LVVA, R-70/5/34.

⁷¹ Estonian Security Police in Narva, February 19, 1942, ERA, R-59/1/65.

as Jews.⁷² Isaac Babadzhan was the only Karaim registered in Tallinn throughout the war.⁷³

Among the victims were several foreign Jews who moved to Estonia shortly before the war. Among the first German Jews who arrived in Estonia (in 1936) was Maria Anna Hoefer. As a Lutheran, Hoefer did not attract much attention, until in August 1942 one of her neighbors denounced her. Magda Beek claimed that thirty-seven-year-old Hoefer, of all things, wanted to rape her. Leopold Silberstein emigrated in 1933 from Germany to Prague. Four years later, Silberstein took up an appointment at the University of Tartu as professor of Czech language and literature. In the fall 1940 semester Silberstein switched to teaching Russian language. Apprehensive of potential anti-Jewish violence, on July 13, 1941, Silberstein left Tartu for the countryside. The following day Silberstein was arrested by members of the Omakaitse, who explained to him the reason for his arrest—Silberstein was Jewish. It did not matter that Dina Michelson, one of the Silberstein's colleagues at the University of Tartu, was a Latvian citizen, for she too was murdered as a Jew. Leopold Levanovich came to Estonia directly from Germany in 1938. Levanovich had spent two-thirds of his life working as a physician and a dentist in Berlin. From June 1941 and until his arrest on September 22 of the same year, Levanovich worked in a neurological hospital in Tallinn. Levanovich received the same treatment as the local Jews from the police—he was charged with communist activities. On October 8, the director of Harku prison camp received the order to immediately transfer Levanovich to Tallinn central prison, the site of his execution three days later.⁷⁴

Rochelle Riva Brenner arrived in Estonia in 1938. Brenner was born out of wedlock to a Swiss mother and a Jewish father. She emigrated from Germany to Austria, only to seek refuge in Estonia a couple of years later. The Estonian Security Police listed Brenner as Jewish, even though the woman herself claimed Swiss ethnicity. Upon her arrest on October 10, 1941, Brenner “confessed” to being Jewish. An older couple, Mihkel and Tiina Piirikiri, who lived across from Brenner's apartment on 29 Harju Street in Tallinn, testified that she had mingled with Jews, as well as with

⁷² German Security Police to Estonian Security Police, November 15, 1943, ERA, R-64/1/44.

⁷³ Estonia Security Police, “List of Foreign Nationals from Enemy States in Tallinn, June 1942–January 1943,” ERA, R-64/1/62.

⁷⁴ Leopold Silberstein, ERA, R-64/4/787; Leopold Levanovich, ERA, R-64/4/428; *Eesti rahvastiku kaotused / Population Losses in Estonia*, 97, 181.

a Russian political commissar who allegedly brought her packages of various sorts. The witnesses claimed that Brenner extolled the Soviet order, and was now making friends among the German military. Brenner denied the charges, saying that she had never interacted with communists and their collaborators, or assisted in the deportation of Estonians. Her execution was carried out on November 7. Dora Ratner was eighteen when she arrived in Tallinn from Berlin in December 1930. Political or racial grounds played no role in her decision to immigrate; love brought Dora Ratner to Estonia. She married a man who owned a candy factory in Tallinn, and who was subsequently arrested by the NKVD. Dora Ratner must have been so happily in love so that she did not notice what was happening in Europe. The woman asked the investigation to ascertain from any of her relatives in Germany and Austria that she was not a communist.⁷⁵

Remarkably, Jews with passports issued by foreign countries (unoccupied by Nazi Germany) escaped death and were even later released from detention. For the first time, the Nazis encountered the problem of Jewish foreign nationals following the conquest of France in June of 1940. American Jews fared the best: in the fall of 1941, the German Foreign Office convinced Adolf Eichmann to exempt U.S. citizens from deportation so as to avoid acts of discrimination against ethnic Germans in the United States.⁷⁶ In Tallinn, thirty-four-year-old U.S. citizen Elias Dreyer was arrested on December 16, but was released on January 30 on the orders of the German Security Police. Dreyer and his four-year-old son could stay free but were required to register in a police precinct daily. On February 1, 1942, new guidelines went out to all police departments to spare foreign citizens who happened to be Jewish.⁷⁷ Apparently, the order did not extend to Jews in the occupied East European countries who were all doomed.

⁷⁵ Rochelle Riva Brenner, ERA, R-64/4/86; Dora Ratner, ERA, R-64/4/1143.

⁷⁶ Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland, 1940–43* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1978), 50, 69, 70, 236f.

⁷⁷ Inspector of Estonian Security Police and Omakaitse, letter book, entry from December 16, 1941, ERA, R-64/1/719; *ibid.* from January 26, 1942, ERA, R-64/1/717; Estonian Security Police, "List of Foreign Nationals from Enemy States in Tallinn, June 1942–January 1943," ERA, R-64/1/62.

Expropriation of Jewish Property

With the decimation of the Estonian Jewish community, the Nazis and their indigenous collaborators simultaneously attempted to seize the property of the victims. They began with books. In August 1941, the University of Tartu assisted the German Security Police in removing “Bolshevik” literature from circulation. President Edgar Kant, who was appointed to this position by the head of the Omakaitse Kurg on July 18, painstakingly counted the amount of gasoline that the university spent moving the books. By early November, the German Security Police began sorting through libraries previously confiscated from Jewish and Bolshevik owners. Kant suggested that the Medical School staff pick up whatever books they might need for teaching and research purposes.⁷⁸ On December 9, head of the Estonian civil administration, Dr. Hjalmar Mäe, signed the order that removed all banned literature, including that authored by Jews, from school libraries. It is worth noting, however, that not everybody obeyed the order; in Viljandi, librarians stored the books of the local Jewish community instead of turning them in.⁷⁹

Judaica was an object of interest to two German agencies, the RSHA and the Operations Staff Alfred Rosenberg (ERR). The two frequently competed for the books from Jewish libraries. In Estonia, a bone of contention was the library that had belonged to Jewish lawyer Dr. Julius Genss in Tartu. Known as an art collector and bibliophile, Genss evacuated to Russia proper. By the time central Nazi agencies learned about the library, six thousand volumes listed in the catalog had already been distributed among various German and Estonian institutions. The Security Police in Tartu seized books on Judaica and Jewish art; their counterpart in Tallinn kept single editions of Russian and French classics; the Estonian Art Museum in Tallinn received some volumes. Through its representatives in Estonia, the ERR asked the RSHA VII Department whether they could obtain copies of Soviet science and propaganda books, if available in multiple copies. The RSHA did not mind as long as they got to keep all the Judaica. Commander of the German Security Police in Esto-

⁷⁸ Tartu University President Kant to German field commandant, August 18, 1941; Hans Kauri to H. Norman, November 5, 1941, EAA, 2100/15/59. Kant, who formerly worked as a geography professor at the University of Tartu, was also a member of the Tartu Omakaitse. The local headquarters approved Kant's appointment as President of Tartu University.

⁷⁹ Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 222–23.

nia Sandberger suggested using local experts from the ERR to evaluate the holdings of the Genss's library, but was rebuked by his superiors in the RSHA, who ordered the books to be sent to Berlin, without allowing the Rosenberg men near. The books were all packed and ready for delivery by the end of December 1941. However, due to the impasse between Heinrich Himmler and the Rosenberg Offices, the negotiations continued well into the spring of the following year. The trucks must have then taken the books to Berlin. In June 1942 the RSHA sent its own experts to Latvia and Estonia. As a result, the VII Department secured another eighty boxes of books and other materials in Estonia that had belonged to the Jewish community in Tartu and several Jewish organizations in Tallinn. The former NKVD building in Riga was used as temporary storage for some forty-five boxes containing the library and archives of the noted Russian-Jewish historian Simon Dubnov. The RSHA quickly made arrangements regarding the transfer of the scholar's collection.⁸⁰

The Soviet authorities had seized Jewish businesses and real estate, so the only property left for grabs was money, valuables, and household articles. In anticipation of their impending arrest, some Jews started selling their property. Ida Gelb, for example, managed to sell most of her belongings before she was arrested on September 24. The Estonian Security Police was interested in Jewish assets, and sometimes asked related questions from arrestees. Isaac Freidin said that he had not mixed with other members of the Jewish community and therefore did not know whether any of them had any valuables.⁸¹ Sometimes the police initiated proceedings against individual Jews whose property they wanted to appropriate. Haim and Alexander Rubin happened to be rich, and it cost them their life. The circumstances of the Rubins' arrest resembled a cheap action-thriller.

Almost everyone in interwar Tallinn knew Alexander Rubin and his jewelry shop on fashionable Viru Street, probably the best in town. The people who in September of 1941 put on police uniforms knew him as well. Unsurprisingly, then, Alexander Rubin and his nephew Haim caught the attention of the Estonian Security Police. The police wanted to know

⁸⁰ Correspondence between RSHA, ERR, Commander of the Security Police in Estonia Sandberger, Commander of the Security Police in the Ostland Walter Stahlecker, November 27, 1941–June 25, 1942, USHMM, RG-15.007/11. There is no consensus as to how and when Simon Dubnov was murdered. Some authors argue that Dubnov died of infectious disease in the Riga ghetto while others think that he was executed on December 8, 1941, during the liquidation of the ghetto.

⁸¹ Ida Gelb, ERA, R-64/4/147; Isaac Freidin, ERA, R-64/4/1170.

where the two hid their property. Policeman Johan Parts named two people who were particularly interested in getting their hands on the Rubins' riches: Tallinn-Harju prefect Evald Mikson and Head of Department B-IV Roland Lepik.⁸² On September 25 the police interrogated Nikolai Rosenberg, who told the investigation the following. For the previous six years he had worked for the joint stock company J. Rubin. Shortly after the Red Army marched into Estonia, one of the shareholders, Haim Rubin, asked Rosenberg to bury a tin vessel in the latter's garage. Rosenberg obeyed but dug out the can, which was marked "no. 3," the following June. Nevertheless, he did not dare open the can and instead put it back. A few days later, Rosenberg was mobilized into the Red Army, but managed to escape. When he checked again, the can was no longer there. Rosenberg threatened Alexander Rubin, another shareholder, that he would report the incident to the police, but the latter bought his silence. Rosenberg assumed that the valuables must by then be in possession of a particular individual with whom the Rubins seemed to be on friendly terms. The investigation records do not tell how much the police wanted the Rubins' diamonds and gold. Instead, Haim Rubin was labeled a Jew, who as a business owner had swindled his customers. That must be the reason why Rubin was put into the category of people "hostile to the German and the Estonian peoples."⁸³ Both Alexander and Haim Rubin appear on the list of Jews executed before October 6.

Ten days after the parents of fourteen-year-old Ruth Rubin were arrested, on September 25, the police came after her. Despite his high status, Mikson appeared personally at the scene. "I am going to shoot all of you if I do not find the diamonds!" shouted Mikson at everyone present. Ruth was pressured to reveal where her father kept his valuables. Eduard Paas, a police official at Tallinn-Nõmme prefecture, followed the letter of the law strictly when he began interrogating the fourteen-year-old. The girl told the policeman that for the last ten days she had stayed with a family friend—the only person she knew. Ruth swore that she did not participate in any communist activities, did not personally know any communists, and did not belong to Komsomol. On October 6, together with four other Jewish women, Ruth Rubin was transferred to Harku prison camp (on occasion designated a "ghetto"). Before sending Ruth Rubin to her death,

⁸² Johan Parts, deposition taken at the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm, no date [1962?] Parts did not call the names, which nevertheless are easy to derive from the context, Yad Vashem Archives, 04/52.

⁸³ Haim Rubin, ERA, R-64/4/1142.

Mikson allegedly raped the girl.⁸⁴ It seems to have been a routine case for Mikson, who regularly arrested Jews, occasionally beating them. It was not unusual for Mikson to check up to twenty-five Jewish homes and businesses a day.⁸⁵

Generally, the dispossession of Estonian Jews was carried out on the basis of the decrees that had earlier been implemented first in Lithuania and then in Latvia. Later, in the fall of 1941, police requested detailed lists of Jewish property, where exactly it was located, and how safely.⁸⁶ On September 11, Tartu newspaper *Postimees* published an announcement of the Tallinn commandant regarding the real estate of the Russians, communists, and Jews who had left the country. Landlords or “Aryan” neighbors were supposed to lock the respective houses and apartments and submit the keys to the commandant’s office.⁸⁷ At least nine Jewish names appeared on the list of “communist activists that fled” from Viljandi and whose property was confiscated.⁸⁸ The main concern was to prevent Jewish belongings and money from falling into the wrong hands. Hence, the former owners were prohibited from signing any property deals.⁸⁹

The systematic inventory of Jewish property in Estonia did not begin in earnest until a year later. The process of expropriation involved several German agencies, most notoriously the civil administration, the Wehrmacht, and the Security Police, which all tried to get the biggest chunk for themselves. Estonian institutions and private citizens likewise helped themselves to Jewish possessions. A conflict of interests was thus inevitable. In February 1942, the Estonian civil administration requested that the municipalities compile a list of all Jewish businesses that for one reason or another had avoided Soviet nationalization. In Põltsamaa, the only significant Jewish establishment was a department store that belonged to Elias Brisk. The business was confiscated by the Soviet authori-

⁸⁴ Ruth Rubin, ERA, R-64/4/665; Ervin Martinson, *Slugi svastiki* [Servants of swastika] (Tallinn: Estonian State Publishing House, 1962), 164–70. Information that Martinson presented in his book should be treated with caution, for the Soviets tended to embellish the evidence.

⁸⁵ Elisabeth White, “Estonia’s Gestapo: The Estonian Political Police in Tallinn, 1941–42,” paper presented at the German Studies Association conference, Atlanta, October 10, 1999.

⁸⁶ Estonian Security Police in Viljandi, September 29, 1941, ERA, R-62/1/1.

⁸⁷ Announcement in *Postimees*, September 11, 1941, reprinted in Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 43.

⁸⁸ List of confiscated property in Viljandi, 1941, ERA, R-62/1/7.

⁸⁹ German Security Police to police prefect in Rakvere, September 11, 1941, in *Pruun Katk*, 122.

ties and handed over to a local cooperative. Additionally, Elias and his brother possessed two patches of farmland and agricultural tools, which at this point were deposited with the county administration.⁹⁰

The property of the arrested Jews was temporarily deposited for safe-keeping with the landlords. Personal belongings either stayed in the apartment of the arrestee or were moved somewhere else in the house, usually to the basement.⁹¹ In an attempt to preserve their property, some Jews signed an act of donation beforehand in favor of their non-Jewish friends, servants, or coworkers. The German civil administration annulled all contracts that involved a transfer of Jewish property to non-Jews after June 21, 1941. The trusteeship (*Treuhandverwaltung*), which operated under the aegis of the Reich Commissioner's Office, obliged the military authorities to compile lists of Jewish property in their possession for the purpose of future redistribution. Effects had to be safely stored in designated places. In Tallinn, for example, the furniture that had belonged to Jews was taken to Maakri Street synagogue, which was used as storage.⁹²

Referring to the relevant orders of Reich commissioner Lohse and Commissar General Litzmann, the Pärnu district commissar appealed to the population to submit any Jewish property, including real estate, personal belongings, valuables, and shares, which had been acquired after June 21, 1941. Non-compliance was punishable by imprisonment and fines or—in severe cases of disobedience—by death.⁹³ Money and valuables were supposed to go to the Reich Commissioner's Office in Tallinn, and golden coins forwarded directly to the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office in Berlin (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*).⁹⁴ When uncertain about the original ownership, the population was encouraged to declare the property nonetheless. Better one too many declarations than one too few—the Reich Commissioner's Office in Tallinn reasoned.⁹⁵

None of these decrees had much substance to them. Simply put, the German civil administration came too late to get their share of the loot.

⁹⁰ Correspondence between Estonian civil administration and Viljandi province administration, February 16 and 19, 1942, in Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 41–42.

⁹¹ Ber Kirschbaum, ERA, R-64/4/338; Rochelle Riva Brenner, ERA, R-64/4/86.

⁹² GK Estonia, Trustee Office, situational report, April 12, 1942, Latvian State Historical Archives (hereafter: LVVA), R-70/2/37; Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving*, 228.

⁹³ Pärnu district commissar, appeal, July 28, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176.

⁹⁴ Reich Commissar Lohse to Commissar General in Estonia Litzmann, March 22, 1943, LVVA, R-70/5/24.

⁹⁵ Office of the Commissar General in Estonia, press release, November 6, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/1918.

The military and police had by then already picked up all the scrubs. Furniture formerly owned by Jews could be found in various offices and private apartments of police and military officers. When the trusteeship officials went to the Jews' apartments, they usually found empty rooms. Very little could be turned into money, to the disappointment of the main office in Riga.⁹⁶ For example, among the recipients of the Jewish property in Narva district were the German Postal Service, the Railway, the Gendarmerie, as well as the Omakaitse and private citizens. The biggest beneficiary, however, was the Wehrmacht, who for that matter refused to produce a list of Jewish property it had misappropriated. District Commissar Friedrich Jenetzky posed as an honest individual and reported a set of silverware, which he had used for representational purposes. Rakvere municipality distributed some of the Jewish possessions among the local population affected by war. The total monetary value of the Jewish property collected in Narva district amounted to 9,000 reichsmarks.⁹⁷

The German civil administration in Tartu encountered similar problems: the Security Police took over the property of executed Jews; the military appropriated everything else of value, furniture in particular. In the end, District Commissar Kurt Meenen earned ca 10,000 reichsmarks by selling the Jewish property, including but not limited to clothing, upholstery, peat (!), photo lab equipment, and watchmaker's tools. Not only individuals but also institutions acquired Jewish property. The Tartu University Meteorological Observatory, for example, paid 42 reichsmarks for a set of measuring instruments.⁹⁸ In Pechory the property of two Jewish physicians such as medical books and tools were distributed between the local hospital and the Red Cross ambulance.⁹⁹ To get money flowing to its special "J" account, the Estonian Trusteeship Office settled for almost anything, including the confiscation of property from Estonians who had been married to Jews. Thus, a few

⁹⁶ Trusteeship by the Office of the Commissar General in Estonia to Trusteeship by the Office of the Reich Commissar in the Ostland, May 13, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176.

⁹⁷ Narva District Commissar Jenetzky to Trusteeship by the Office of the Commissar General in Estonia, July 21, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176.

⁹⁸ Tartu District Commissar Meenen to Trusteeship by the Office of the Commissar General in Estonia, April 10, 1943, ERA, R-65/1/1918; *ibid.* July 30, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176. It was not uncommon for the institutions of higher learning throughout Europe to acquire Jewish property. The University of Latvia, for example, laid claim to medical instruments in the Riga ghetto infirmary.

⁹⁹ Pskov District Commissar to Trusteeship by the Office of the Commissar General in Estonia, May 22, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176.

items that Emma Tuch had brought into the family ended up in a storage facility on Sakala Street in Tartu.¹⁰⁰

The German Security Police cemented friendly relations with its Estonian counterpart by magnanimously sharing with the latter whatever was left of Jewish property. In January 1944, the new commander of the Security Police in Estonia, Bernhard Baatz, secured a few dozen leather gloves, mittens, suits, shoes, and curtains for his Estonian colleagues. These items, according to Baatz, should have boosted the joy for work (*Arbeitsfreudigkeit*) among the Estonian police officials.¹⁰¹ The robbing of Jewish property in Estonia even made it into the international news. The BBC German-language broadcast of June 26, 1943, accused top Nazi officials in occupied Estonia of personal enrichment. Commissar General Litzmann was said to have illegally acquired property belonging to Estonian Jews. Whatever Litzmann got hold of, he sent back home to Germany. About Sandberger the radio said that he confiscated General Laidoner's library, which he later shipped to the Reich.¹⁰²

People who acquired Jewish property in the summer and fall of 1941, by legal or illegal means, were reluctant to surrender it. To be able to keep what they thought lawfully belonged to them, some Estonians engaged in protracted correspondence with the civil and police authorities. Following an announcement by the local headquarters in Võru regarding a clearance sale of Jewish property, Rudolf Allikvee purchased a dresser drawer from Reiha Teitmann. In accordance with established procedure, an Estonian police official verified the deal and received the money, 30 reichsmarks. The money thus collected was later transferred to the Security Police in Tartu. As far as Allikvee was concerned, he wanted the dresser drawer officially listed as his property. Peeter Dorbek from Viljandi also sought justice. In July 1941, Dorbek bought a cupboard and a set of dishes to go along with it from a Jew. Dorbek was acting for purely selfish reasons: he purchased the cupboard for his daughter in Tallinn. Although officially Dorbek received the abovementioned items for safekeeping, he treated them as his own. Dorbek was determined to fight to the last; his case was still under consideration as of May 1944. That time around, Dorbek ar-

¹⁰⁰ List: monetary value of Jewish property, no date [spring 1942], ERA, R-65/1/2176.

¹⁰¹ Correspondence between Commander of the German Security Police in Estonia Baatz and Commissar General in Estonia Litzmann, January 28 and 31, 1944, ERA, R-65/1/1918. Baatz replaced Sandberger in his position in September 1943.

¹⁰² RSHA to commander of the Security Police in the Ostland Humberg Achamer-Pifrader, June 29, 1943, USHMM, RG-11.001M/75.

gued that he had to hand over the cupboard to his son-in-law, in the service of German air force, whose entire property was lost during the Soviet bombing raid on Tallinn on March 9, 1944. Finally, Dorbek managed to clandestinely get the cupboard to the countryside—out of reach of the commander of the German Security Police in Viljandi who wanted it for his office.

Gustav Kornel was not at all like the two individuals described above. He was educated. He was also a victim—a victim of war, that is. Dr. Kornel's apartment went up in flames as the Wehrmacht laid siege to Tartu. Kornel decided to start from scratch by making Nõmme his new home. Nõmme municipality acknowledged Kornel's suffering at the hands of the Soviets by awarding him furniture formerly owned by a Jewish family. Very soon it also became common practice in Nõmme to distribute Jewish and communist property among the war-affected people. Kornel pledged to handle the furniture with care and to follow regulations regarding its usage. The next thing Kornel knew, he was hired as an assistant professor at Tartu University. Because it was almost impossible to obtain household items in war-ravaged Tartu, Kornel took whatever he could with him, including furniture robbed from Jews. When asked to return the furniture, Kornel, as a law-abiding citizen, requested to buy it. It must have been a very good set of furniture, since the Tartu University professor went all the way to Commissar General Litzmann with his request. At least none of Kornel's relatives died, as was the case with Helmi Ehajärv in Viljandi. Her husband, an anti-Soviet partisan, fell in combat and thus left the woman alone with a small daughter and stepmother to care for. On July 4, 1941, Ehajärv purchased a cupboard, four chairs, and a dinning table from a local Jew, Jossel Blumberg, paying 150 Soviet rubles for everything. This was a real deal, because later these five items were estimated at 1,000 rubles. The widow then wanted the purchase proclaimed legal, so that she could keep the furniture, which was absolutely essential for her household, she said. Ehajärv again and again evoked the memory of her fallen husband to save the movables. It was clear to her that she could not afford to buy furniture otherwise.¹⁰³ Sometimes Jewish property became the subject of blackmail: One of the tenants in a house owned by August Kapsi testified that the latter had misappropriated several pieces of furniture that belonged to Jewish renters.¹⁰⁴ In February 1943 alone, Estonian

¹⁰³ Correspondence regarding Allikvee, Dorbek, Kornel, and Ehajärv's cases, December 1942–May 1944, ERA, R-65/1/1918; ERA, R-65/1/2176.

¹⁰⁴ German Security Police in Tallinn, minutes, May 31, 1943, ERA, R-65/1/1918.

Security Police charged at least fifteen people with either hiding or trading Jewish property.¹⁰⁵

The synagogues in Estonia remained intact throughout the war. Like elsewhere in occupied Eastern Europe, the Nazis used the largest buildings as POW camps. That was the original function of the Tallinn, Tartu, and Narva synagogues. At other times the synagogues were used as storage facilities. The synagogue on Maakri Street in Tallinn, for example, officially belonged to the headquarters of the Army Group North Rear Areas. That is where personal belongings of Leonhard Sammül (among other items was the Schröder piano) ended up in April 1942.¹⁰⁶ As of April 1943 the interior of the synagogue remained for the most part unchanged, except for a few broken benches and a missing chandelier.¹⁰⁷ The Tallinn synagogue was reduced to rubble by the massive Soviet air raid on March 9, 1944. The synagogue in Tartu was also damaged beyond repair.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter may seem to contradict those in the previous chapter. Whereas I used the example of Tallinn to emphasize the detached, bureaucratic mode of operation assumed by the Estonian Security Police, the brutal manner in which mass executions were conducted elsewhere in the country may suggest the opposite. The question here is essentially of agency versus individuals—the classical dichotomy that encapsulates the study of history. On top of that comes the issue of sources. Chapter 5 related an institutional system of mock justice, which on the one hand helped to psychologically relieve a perpetrator's conscience, and on the other made it acceptable to the general population. Effectively, I spoke about the process. The process of investigation, however, in the case of Jews inevitably resulted in a death sentence. How the death sentences were carried out in and around the capital city remained outside the scope of the chapter. Had I the relevant sources at my disposal,

¹⁰⁵ Estonian Security Police, lists of arrested individuals, February 23 and 26, 1943, ERA, R-64/1/109.

¹⁰⁶ General Commissar in Estonia Office, memo, April 20, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/2176. The former "Jewish Club" on Väike-Karja Street in Tallinn served as a storage facility for cultural treasures temporarily removed from one of the former manor houses (ERR, memo, October 16, 1941, BAB, NS-30/146).

¹⁰⁷ P. Ivask, report, April 12, 1943, ERA, R-65/1/144.

I might have concluded that individual executioners at Tallinn displayed the same propensity for brutality as they did, for example, at Tartu. The routine act of investigation versus execution projected different dynamics. Whereas Estonian Jews were “prosecuted” on an individual basis, they were put to death en masse. Thus, in the physical act of destruction, Estonia and Estonians come across not significantly different from other countries and peoples of occupied Eastern Europe.

When it comes to the geography and chronology of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews in Estonia, the documentary base is fairly uneven. As mentioned earlier, Estonian Security Police investigation files are mainly available for Tallinn, but not other cities. The Soviet war crimes investigation focused on two specific sites of mass terror in Estonia, Tartu and Jägala concentration camps, while the West German judicial authorities looked into the atrocities committed in the Jewish forced labor camps (the subject of the next chapter). None of these sources should be taken at face value, obviously. The critical analysis does not support the notion that, due to political expedience—as discussed in detail in chapter 8—any records produced by Soviet authorities are a priori biased. Had we dismissed war crimes trials records as a legitimate historical source, we would have to admit defeat in ever finding as to who pulled the trigger and why. Along with the issue of victimization, this constitutes the essence of the inquiry in what is commonly known as the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 7

The Business of Survival: Baltic Oil Ltd. and Jewish Forced Labor Camps in Estonia

The concept of *extermination through labor* has been extensively used to mark a transitional phase between conventional discrimination and mass murder. Recently, however, some Holocaust historians have modified this notion, arguing that the use of Jewish forced labor in the Third Reich preempted any Nazi plans to destroy Jews as a group. Christopher Browning and Wolf Gruner have demonstrated that in many cases “segregated labor deployment” (*der geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz*) of Jews continued well into the mid-1943. Despite the severe post-facto criticism of Jewish Councils that had diligently supervised forced labor in an attempt to salvage the remaining ghetto populations, the fact remains that Jews who were engaged in slave labor had at least some chance of survival. Indeed, the exploitation of Jewish slave labor, though on a limited scale, persisted within the framework of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question,” and for much longer than scholars presumed.

Browning has maintained that although a sporadic use of Jewish forced labor in Poland in 1942 and 1943 did not supersede the ultimate ideological goals of the Nazis, for some of the inmates it meant life. Hence he talked about “survival through labor.” The starkest opponent of the continuous use of Jewish slave labor was Heinrich Himmler, who sought even greater control over the surviving Jewish armament workers and their eventual death. The Warsaw ghetto uprising influenced Himmler’s decision to liquidate the remaining “work ghettos” in the East. Thus, between March and November 1943 all but a few ghettos in Poland and the occupied Soviet territories were dismantled and their inhabitants murdered. According to Browning, by November 1943 Himmler had relaxed his obsessive campaign to rid continental Europe of the Jews; the

acute shortage of manpower proved a decisive factor in prolonging the existence of a handful of work camps and ghettos.¹

Gruner painted a larger picture, examining the dynamics of Jewish forced labor in Germany, Austria, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and Poland. He insisted that the “segregated labor deployment” of Jews was possible due to the limited role of the SS in the planning and running of forced labor. The interests groups who stressed the needs of the war economy, armaments in particular, included German state agencies and private enterprises. At the end of 1942, about 400,000 Jews were still performing labor in Germany and Poland. The total number of labor camps and ghettos outside the concentration camp system in existence between 1938 and 1943 could be as high as 1,300. Except for a few references to the Łódź ghetto, which survived until 1944, Gruner finished his study in 1943. He only briefly mentioned that the program of Jewish slave labor had been extended to Western Europe and the Soviet Union.² This is rather symptomatic, demonstrating the lack of information on Jewish slave labor in the occupied Soviet territories from summer 1943 onward. The struggle between German industry and the SS over Jewish labor in the Galician oil fields in 1941–44 appears to be the only exception. The continuous exploitation of Jewish slave labor in the Carpathian region is also the closest parallel to the Estonian case.³

Until now scholars have largely examined Jewish slave labor as a phenomenon, focusing on structures and organization. Entries on Jewish forced labor in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, for example, are organized geographically on a camp-to-camp basis. The research on Starachowice factory camp by Christopher Browning may be one of the most extensive studies that link the exploitation of Jewish labor to a particular industry. Of all German companies associated with the Nazi persecution of Jews, I. G. Farben—the largest chemical enterprise in the world at the time—has received most attention. This is not surprising, perhaps, consid-

¹ Christopher Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 58–60, 79–88.

² Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ix–xvii, 31, 275, 278–92.

³ Thomas Sandkühler, “Endlösung” in Galizien: *Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz 1941–1944* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1996), esp. chapter 9; Rainer Karlsch and Raymond Stokes, “Faktor Öl”: *Die Mineralölwirtschaft in Deutschland 1859–1974* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 218–32; Bernd Schmalhausen, *A Man of Courage in an Inhuman Time: Berthold Beitz in the Third Reich* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006).

ering the amount of incriminating evidence that emerged during the I. G. Farben trial at Nuremberg in 1947–48. The industrial production of Zyklon B gas by one of I. G. Farben's subsidiaries has become one of the most recognizable features of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. Coincidentally, it was I. G. Farben and the Dresdner Bank that, in 1938, acquired shares in Estonian synthetic oil production.⁴ The needs of the oil industry played a central role in the decision to establish a system of Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia five years later.

The bibliography on Jewish forced labor camps in Estonia is rather thin. Until recently, a study of Mark Dworzecki was the only available book on the subject. Writing in the 1960s, Dworzecki had no access to the Soviet sources. As a Holocaust survivor, he naturally focused first and foremost on the experiences of Jewish inmates in Estonia.⁵ The recently published memoirs of Herman Kruk also contain information on Estonian camps.⁶ Alfred Streim, taking advantage of his position as the head of the Central Office for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg, West Germany, produced the first scholarly article that mentions, among other camps on the occupied Soviet territory, those established in Estonia in 1943.⁷ Published in Tallinn in 2006, the Reports of the Estonian International Commission is by far the most authoritative source on the Nazi occupation of Estonia. The volume features a separate article on the camp system in Estonia, making the apparent connection between the arrival of Jewish transports and the need for manpower. The article on combat in Estonia in 1944, however, does not mention the Estonian oil industry as a factor that had stiffened German resistance to advancing Soviet troops.⁸ Of all historians, Ruth Bettina Birn has thus far provided the most extensive analysis of the Nazi camp system in Estonia.⁹

⁴ Vasara, "Die deutschbaltische Minderheit in Estland in der Zwischenkriegszeit," 583.

⁵ Mark Dworzecki, *Vaise Nekht un Shvartse Teg*.

⁶ Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁷ Alfred Streim, "Konzentrationslager auf dem Gebiet der Sowjetunion," *Dachauer Hefte* 5, no. 5 (November 1989): 174–87.

⁸ Riho Västriik and Meelis Maripuu, "Vaivara Concentration Camp in 1943–1944"; Toomas Hiio, "Combat in Estonia in 1944," in *Estonia, 1940–1945*, 719–38, 1035–94. See also Maripuu, "Das nationalsozialistische Lagersystem in Estland 1941–1944," in *Nationalsozialistische Zwangslager: Strukturen und Regionen, Täter und Opfer*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, and Angelika Königseder (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2011), 99–111.

⁹ Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei in Estland 1941–1944*, 179–84; Birn, "Konzentrationslager Vaivara," 130–84; Birn, "Vaivara Main Camp," 1491–1509.

This chapter seeks to situate Jewish forced labor in Estonia in the context of the Nazi program of annihilation, looking specifically at the “destruction through labor” policy. For this reason I spend little time discussing the conditions in individual camps, something that Dworzecki has already done in his book. My other objective is to establish a closer link between the Jewish camp system and the production of synthetic oil. I argue that German economic interests not only ensured the survival of a substantial portion of Jewish slave laborers who ended up in Estonia in 1943, but also defined the course of military combat in that country the following year. By contrasting Browning’s discussion of “survival through labor” to the “business of genocide,” which Michael Thad Allen chose as a title for his study of slave labor in the SS concentration camps, I have come up with the most accurate description of the situation in Estonia in the last years of German occupation—the business of survival.

The Importance of the Estonian Shale Oil Industry for the German War Machine

Shale oil is Estonia’s only mineral resource. Shale oil deposits are found in the northeastern part of the country, along the Tallinn-Narva railway line. The search for alternative sources of fuel in the last years of the First World War made the Russian government consider the exploitation of the low-yielding shale oil. The independent Estonian state, however, lacked the resources to capitalize on those efforts. Thanks to foreign investments, the Estonian shale oil industry underwent rapid development in the 1930s.¹⁰ The Estonian oil reserves were estimated at one billion tons, compared to four billion tons estimated for the United States, for example. The Estonian shale oil deposits were of high quality: the distillation yielded 20 percent crude oil, compared with 10 percent in Scotland, and only 4–7 percent in Germany. That made the Estonian impregnating oil one of the best in the world. By the mid-1920s production gradually shifted to oil extraction.¹¹

On the eve of the Second World War, six companies, five plants, and eight mines were involved in oil production in Estonia. The Estonian state

¹⁰ Uno Kaur, *Wirtschaftsstruktur und Wirtschaftspolitik des Freistaates Estland 1918–1940* (Bonn: Baltisches Forschungsinstitut, 1962), 68.

¹¹ U.S. Legation in Stockholm, Arvo Horm’s report, “The Estonian Shale Oil Industry,” June 2, 1944, NARA, M-1170/23.

greatly benefited from selling concessions to foreign owners and charging them a special tax on oil products. Private companies operating in Estonia were primarily interested in crude oil (heating oil) and gasoline production.¹² The Estonian shale oil industry reached an unprecedented level of development in the second half of the 1930s thanks to profitable contracts with German companies. From 1935 onward, the German Navy became the largest consumer of Estonian oil products. Domestic production of fuel could not keep pace with the navy's rapid buildup. In order to meet growing demand, Nazi economic experts suggested substituting coal with shale oil. The first delivery to the German Navy was shipped in March 1937. Subsequently, a number of similar treaties between the two countries were concluded, so that in 1939 alone Germany received 105,000 tons of crude oil and 5,000 tons of gasoline from Estonia.¹³ Thanks to foreign, mainly German, credit, the output of crude oil and gasoline in Estonia tripled between 1935 and 1939.

The Soviet occupation and subsequent annexation of the Baltic states did not substantially hamper German economic interests in the region. As before, the most important consideration for the Germans was to retain control over Estonian shale oil. The head of the RSHA, Reinhard Heydrich, was concerned about the status of the industries in Latvia and Estonia vital for Nazi Germany. Number one on Heydrich's list was the oil-producing plant at Kohtla-Järve, the largest of the five.¹⁴ Immediately after the Soviet Union took over the Baltic states in the summer of 1940, the export of crude oil from Estonia abruptly declined, from 14,241 tons in July to 3,732 tons in August. During these two months, Germany imported a total of 450,000 tons of crude oil, mainly from Romania and the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the sharp disagreement between Soviet and German sides, the latter haggled over a delivery of additional 85,000 tons of crude oil from Estonia.¹⁶

¹² David Crowe, "The History of the Oil Industry in Independent Estonia," *Nationalities Papers* 6, no. 1 (1978): 11.

¹³ Manfred Rasch, "Zur Mineralölpolitik der Kriegsmarine," 83–85.

¹⁴ Head of RSHA Heydrich to Foreign Minister v. Ribbentrop, October 9, 1939, in *Diktierter Option: Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939–1941*, ed. Dietrich Loeber (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1972), 129.

¹⁵ Economic and Armament Office of the Army High Command, monthly report, re. mineral oil deliveries for German armament industry, August 1940, BA-MA, RW19/202.

¹⁶ Rasch, "Zur Mineralölpolitik der Kriegsmarine," 83; Hans-Erich Volkmann, "Ökonomie und Machtpolitik Lettland und Estland im politisch-ökonomischen Kalkül des Dritten Reiches (1933–1940)," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2, no. 4 (1976): 496–500.

The German XVIII Army crossed the border into Estonia on July 7, 1941. In effect, continental Estonia played a role in the German's strategic plans only as a transit route to Russia. Additional considerations included control over the production of synthetic gasoline in northeastern Estonia, as well as military hegemony in the Baltic Sea region. Despite fierce Soviet resistance, by August 7 German troops reached the Gulf of Finland at Kunda. The Red Army faced the threat of encirclement. However, the imminent military defeat was postponed by the decision to redirect several divisions eastward, with the purpose of securing a complex of shale oil processing plants in the area between Kiviõli and Sillamäe.¹⁷ The Soviets did not have enough time on their hands to completely destroy the Estonian shale oil industry. The Mineral Oil Commando North was expected to join the German XXVI Army Corps heading for Estonia. The commando laid claim to oil refineries even before Wehrmacht troops captured the northeastern region of Estonia. The Kiviõli refinery incurred the least damage and therefore was the first designated to be rebuilt. Production at Kiviõli began as early as August 26, 1941, with a daily output of some two hundred tons.¹⁸ In less than a year, the Germans were able to rebuild all five refineries: Kiviõli, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe, Kohtla, and Jõhvi. Yet the output remained low compared to the prewar years. The lack of manpower hampered efforts to raise production to its prewar levels.¹⁹

Hitler designated the production of synthetic fuel a top priority as early as December 1941. The fortunes of Estonia's shale oil region had greatly improved by the fall of 1942, as the Soviets frustrated German attempts to capture the oilfields in North Caucasus. The head of the Office of the Four-Year Plan Hermann Göring recognized synthetic oil production in Estonia as the most essential industry in the Baltic.²⁰ In so doing, Göring drew upon Hitler's order from October 12, 1942, that called for the rebuilding of the Estonian oil refineries.²¹

On March 27, 1941, a new joint stock company, Continental Oil (Kontinentale Öl A.G.), was established in Berlin. Officially, the company was

¹⁷ Werner Haupt, *Baltikum 1941: Die Geschichte eines ungelösten Problems* (Neckargemünd: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1963), 96–120.

¹⁸ German 18th Army, IV Wi to Min. Commando North, July 9, 1941, BA-MA, RW-46/298; German 18th Army, IV Wi, to Min. Commando North, August 10, 1941; German 18th Army, IV Wi, to WiIn North, August 18, 1941; WiIn North to WiStab Ost, August 27, 1941, BA-MA, RW-46/299.

¹⁹ Office of Commissar General in Estonia, note, May 15, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/4.

²⁰ Göring, memo, March 16, 1943, BAB, R-6/286.

²¹ Letter forwarded to Baltic Oil, June 19, 1943, ERA, R-187/1/7.

supposed to represent the interests of the German oil industry abroad. In practice, it received a monopoly (for ninety-nine years) on the exploitation of oil deposits in occupied Eastern Europe.²² Baltic Oil Ltd. (Baltische Öl GmbH) was officially established as a branch company of Continental Oil on October 1, 1942. Baltic Oil received large concessions for exploiting shale oil, petroleum, and natural gas resources in the Ostland and neighboring territories. The deliveries of crude oil were to increase from 100,000 tons in 1943 to 425,000 tons in 1946.²³ The Reich Minister for Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer, outlined the plans for expansion of the shale oil industry during his visit to Estonia on December 22, 1943.

Within a year Baltic Oil had developed into a huge enterprise, with all five refineries working at top capacity. In addition to these refineries, Baltic Oil operated seven quarries and mines, some of them seventy-five meters deep.²⁴ The German Navy was identified as the sole recipient of oil derivatives. In September 1943, Baltic Oil negotiated a fifteen-year contract with the navy. Fuel for the German Navy constituted 85 percent of total Baltic Oil production. Because of its qualities, crude shale oil turned out to be excellent fuel for submarines: it was heavier than water and so did not rise to the surface if a submarine got hit, thus increasing its chance of escape from the enemy.²⁵ The engineering staff was close to starting to produce fuel for warplanes. The situation in Romania, a major oil supplier to Nazi Germany, was deteriorating and so were the supply routes in southern Europe. The more the territory under German control shrank, the more important Estonia became to the Nazi war economy. For one thing, the Estonian shale oil industry played an important role in defining the course of warfare on the Leningrad Front during the first nine months of 1944.

²² *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, March 30, 1941; Office of Reich Minister for the Ostland, memo, November 15, 1943, BAB, R-6/5.

²³ Baltic Oil, memo, September 8, 1943, ERA, R-187/1/3. The contract was signed on February 12, 1944.

²⁴ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten 1941–1943* (Boppard: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1991), 210, 225.

²⁵ U.S. Legation in Stockholm, Arvo Horm's report, "The Estonian shale oil industry," June 2, 1944, NARA, M-1170/23.

Baltic Oil Ltd. and the Hunt for Manpower

An acute shortage of manpower plagued the shale oil industry all the way through 1943. Baltic Oil had at its disposal a mere one-fourth of the workforce it had employed in the 1930s. There was no hope of bridging the gap with local workers, as the shale oil region was sparsely populated. The Labor Office in Tallinn announced early on its inability to supply the company with manpower. Furthermore, the police authorities did not yield to the request to release miners and industrial workers from active service in the police battalions and the Omakaitse. Failure to meet the challenge endangered the deliveries of crude oil crucial for the German Navy.²⁶ Due to the strategic importance of shale oil production, Baltic Oil was given priority regarding the workforce: no other industry in Estonia could claim workers until the company's needs were satisfied. In the fall of 1942, the industrial giant began hiring farmers, but with little success. To fill the gap, the management needed at least 2,250 workers, but was only able to secure 300. So dire was the situation that the Germans brought to a halt the program that sent (often against their will) able-bodied men from Estonia to Germany.²⁷

As of November 1942, Baltic Oil was short nine thousand workers. Yet all requests for additional workforce had been refused. The attempt in June 1942 to bring some five hundred construction workers from Königsberg failed. In September and October of 1942, Baltic Oil tried its luck in Lithuania. The Labor Office in Kaunas and Vilnius scrambled to deliver five hundred workers to Jõhvi and Kohtla-Järve. The police went ahead with roundups after only a few dozens men showed up at an assembly point. After a delay, two transports departed for Estonia on October 23 and 26, respectively.²⁸

This fact is quite significant for the discussion on the use of Jewish forced labor. While local police was snatching Lithuanians off the streets of Kaunas and Vilnius for labor assignments at Baltic Oil, two Jewish

²⁶ Baltic Oil, weekly report no. 4, December 31, 1941, ERA, R-187/1/10; Baltic Oil to Commissar General in Estonia Litzmann, April 20, 1942, ERA, R-65/1/4; Office of Commissar General in Estonia, notes on the master plan for the Estonian shale oil region, January 27, 1943, BAB, R-91/Reval/4. The total number of workers in Estonia decreased from 54,700 in 1937 to 31,400 in early 1942.

²⁷ Office of Commissar General in Estonia, dep. III to Richard A. Aster, January 20, 1943, ERA, R-65/1/113.

²⁸ Commissar General in Lithuania Adrian T. von Renteln to Commissar General of the Ostland Lohse, October 29, 1942, BAB, R-91/Kauen-Land/1.

transports arrived in Estonia from Theresienstadt and Frankfurt/Berlin respectively. The transport from the Theresienstadt ghetto reached Raasiku near Tallinn on September 5, 1942, with 1,002 men and women onboard, while the transport from Germany brought to Estonia on October 1 another 1,049 male and female prisoners. Some 1,754 Czech and German Jews were murdered on the spot by a special detachment of the Estonian Security Police.²⁹ Hypothetically, the victims could have been used as slave laborers in the synthetic oil production. Apparently, by fall 1942 nobody had yet considered the exploitation of cheap Jewish labor, probably because the very possibility of Jewish deportations to Estonia was ruled out as unattainable. An alternative explanation would be that the decision to reroute both transports from Riga was taken spontaneously, hence the lack of coordination.

In January 1943, Baltic Oil reported a total of 7,300 workers: 3,200 Estonian civilians; 2,000 Soviet POWs; 900 Lithuanian and Latvian forced laborers; 800 personnel (including seventy Germans); and 400 Ukrainians.³⁰ Soviet prisoners of war constituted the main source of free labor for Baltic Oil. Specifically for that purpose, Army Group North established a transit camp (Dulag 377) in the shale oil region. As of December 1943, however, Baltic Oil employed 17,133 workers, in addition to 11,645 workers in the service of Organization Todt (OT).³¹ The 24 percent increase in the workforce from June 1943 occurred mainly on account of Jewish slave laborers.

Beginning in January 1943, the Commissar General's Office in Tallinn held regular meetings concerning the future of the shale oil region. The German Security Police was one of the permanent participants in the consultations. In the first half of 1943 the Germans experienced a series of setbacks. As the military situation was deteriorating, the Army High Command had to lift the siege of Leningrad. The shale oil industry in Estonia, essential for the German war machine, urgently needed manpower. To help the situation, on June 21, 1943, Himmler ordered the liquidation of the remaining Jewish ghettos in the Ostland. Work-fit ghetto inmates were to be transferred to Estonia, and the rest "evacuated to the

²⁹ For the numbers of victims see Wolfgang Scheffler and Diana Schulle, eds., *Book of Remembrance: The German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jews Deported to the Baltic States*, vol. 2 (Munich: G. Saur, 2003), 872–916.

³⁰ Director of Baltic Oil Wilhelm Mathy, report, January 6, 1943, ERA, R-187/1/3.

³¹ Statistics: current condition of Baltic Oil, January 15, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/3; Economic Staff East, transcript of a discussion, March 17, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/7.

East” (read: murdered). In Estonia, Jews were to be locked up in concentration camps.³² The deportation of Jews to Estonia should have balanced the planned withdrawal of twenty-five thousand POWs from the Ostland.

On July 19, Himmler’s order was communicated to the German Security Police in Estonia, and the following week to the Economic Inspectorate Ostland (*Wirtschaftsinspektion*). In order to prevent contact between the Jews and the local population, the inspectorate recommended that concentration camps be built at the refineries or in their immediate vicinity. In anticipation of the influx of Jewish slave labor, Fritz Sauckel, Plenipotentiary General for Labor Mobilization, paid a visit to the Mineral Oil Commando Kiviõli on July 17, and on July 25 toured the oil refinery at Kiviõli.³³ As the date of deportation approached, more and more German agencies in Estonia put forward requests for Jewish workers. One of the major players in the field was OT, which employed people of sixteen different nationalities in Estonia. OT was expected to deliver a total of sixty-three wooden barracks for existing and new labor camps.³⁴ That was not the main reason, however, why OT needed Jewish workers.

The closer the front drew to the borders of Estonia, the more acute became the need to protect the Baltic region in general and the shale oil industry in particular. On August 12, 1943, Hitler ordered the construction of the so-called East Wall (Ostwall), a colossal fortification stretching from the Black Sea in the south all the way to the Baltic Sea in the north.³⁵ In mid-September Army Group North unveiled plans for a defense along the Narva River under the codename “Panther Line.” The Wehrmacht was expected to pull back to the new positions by late winter–early spring of 1944.³⁶ The shape of the Narva River required building a bridgehead immediately east of the city of Narva. This project alone required about twenty thousand workers. In order to have at least part of the job done before the winter, military contractors were urged to

³² Rose Lerer Cohen and Saul Issroff, *The Holocaust in Lithuania, 1941–1945: A Book of Remembrance* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2002), 30.

³³ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, war diaries, July 19, 25, and 26, August 7, 1943; Economic Inspectorate Ostland, raw materials dep., weekly report, July 18–24, 1943; Economic Inspectorate Ostland, report for the month of July 1943, August 5, 1943, BA-MA, RW-30/8.

³⁴ Baltic Oil, memo, October 25, 1943, ERA, R-187/1/6.

³⁵ Army High Command to Army Group North, August 12, 1943, BA-MA, RH-19 III/293.

³⁶ Transcript of a conversation between Commander of Army Group North Georg von Kühler, General Walter Braemer, and Commissar General in the Ostland Lohse, September 19, 1943, BAB, 45/TL.

“improvise.”³⁷ As the site of one of the two planned refineries, Vaivara was located next to the combat zone. Although the Baltic Oil management was unhappy with the prospect of ceding some of its workforce to the construction of the defense, it had no choice but to agree to deliver the workers—predominantly Jewish.

To discuss the forthcoming deployment of Jews in more details, on July 20 the head of the German Security Police in Estonia, Sandberger, met with the Baltic Oil director Wilhelm Mathy. The first 2,800 Jews were to arrive sometime before September. Of that number, one thousand were to work in mines, with the rest assigned to building the defense. On August 7, Economic Inspectorate Ostland received information about the start of deportations of work-fit Jews from the ghettos in Lithuania. According to the original timetable, the deportations would be over by the end of the month. Himmler determined October 15 as the deadline past which Jews could not perform labor outside of concentration camps.³⁸ According to the Economic Commando in Tallinn, by early fall of 1943 up to ten thousand Jews were to arrive in Estonia.³⁹

As of September 1943 about fifty-four thousand Jews remained in the Baltic. Forty thousand of them were deemed fit for work.⁴⁰ The Jewish ghetto in Vilna (Vilnius) contained about twenty thousand inhabitants and that in Kovno (Kaunas) seventeen thousand. According to Yitzhak Arad’s calculations, the four transports that departed the Vilna ghetto between August 6 and September 24 brought anywhere between 7,300 and 9,130 Jews to Estonia.⁴¹ With the destruction of the Vilna ghetto, Kovno and Shavli (Šiauliai) remained the only two ghettos in Lithuania. As a result of deportations from the Kovno ghetto on September 15 and October 26, a total of 4,500 Jews ended up in Estonia.⁴² The final large-scale deportation

³⁷ Army Group North v. K  chler to Army Group Staff, August 19, 1943; Army Group North, points of reference for the discussion re. “Panther Position,” September 1, 1943, BA-MA, RH-19 III/293.

³⁸ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, war diaries, September 15, 1943, BA-MA, RW-30/8.

³⁹ Economic Commando Tallinn, situational report, July 30–August 28, 1943, BA-MA, RW-30/59.

⁴⁰ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, workshop, September 13–14, 1943, BA-MA, RW-30/8.

⁴¹ Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1980), 420, 429–32.

⁴² Willem Mishell, *Kaddish for Kovno: Life and Death in a Lithuanian Ghetto, 1941–1945* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1988), 160, 165, 167–72; Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 420, 456, 463, 474–75, 507.

to Estonia took place in late November 1943, when a transport with five hundred male Jews arrived from Kaiserwald (Mežaparks) in Latvia.⁴³

Jewish Forced Labor Camps in Estonia

The geographic distribution of identified reserves of shale oil in Estonia determined the location for the future Jewish forced labor camps. Major deposits of shale oil are in the triangle Rakvere-Vaivara-Lake Peipus, and that is where all but a few Jewish forced labor camps were built. There were nineteen major camps in Estonia, from east to west: Narva, Narva-Jõesuu, Auvere, Putki, Vaivara, Viivikonna, Soski, Kuremäe, Jõhvi, Ereda, Kohtla, Saka, Kiviõli, Sonda, Aseri, Kunda, Jägala, Lagedi, and Klooga. Some of these camps were supposed to exist only for a few weeks but remained operational for months. Jägala and Lagedi were not, strictly speaking, “labor camps.” Lagedi only existed for one and a half months in August and September 1944, and was meant to be a transit camp for the Jews bound for the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland. Larger camps such as Viivikonna, Kiviõli, and Ereda were effectively subdivided into two sections; hence the disparity in numbers of Jewish camps in Estonia as they appear in various accounts. In addition, the Germans operated five smaller camps in northwestern Russia, southern Estonia, and northern Latvia. The SS camp administration had its seat in Vaivara, some 25 kilometers west of Narva. Hans Aumeier was appointed head of the Vaivara administration (before then he served as the deputy to Rudolf Höss at Auschwitz).

Officially, Vaivara concentration camp was established on Himmler’s order from September 15, 1943.⁴⁴ Vaivara was designated as the main camp (*Stammlager* or *Stalag*), overseeing numerous subcamps (*Aussenlager*), or labor camps (*Arbeitslager*). “Vaivara” was often used as a generic name for all Jewish labor camps in Estonia. All the Jewish prisoners who arrived in Estonia passed through Vaivara, which justifies calling it a transit camp (*Durchgangslager* or *Dulag*). Altogether, German camp personnel in Estonia did not exceed fifty people, including four female guards. Several companies of the Estonian 287th Police Battalion in Rakvere and one company of the 290th Police Battalion in Tartu provided

⁴³ Boris Kacel, *From Hell to Redemption: A Memoir of the Holocaust* (Niwt, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 117–22.

⁴⁴ RSHA, IV C, Müller, circular letter, October 2, 1943, BAB, R-58/1027.

guards for the Jewish slave labor camps. The total number of guards, who had no right to enter camp territory, reached three hundred.

Jews were constantly moved from one camp to another, depending on the amount of work to be done. The total number of Jews in slave labor camps in Estonia increased from 3,300 in September to 9,207 in November. By May 1944, however, that number had reduced to 6,565.⁴⁵ Jewish prisoners worked under the supervision of OT on various assignments such as construction, cutting trees, and building roads and railway tracks. Their principal economic activity, however, was mining shale oil and building fortifications. Prisoners were expected to crush two cubic meters of oil-bearing rock per day, which would produce 0.5 barrels of oil.

The Jews were mentioned for the first time in statistics from September 1943. Between July 1 and September 30, the number of workers at Baltic Oil and its OT contractor increased from 25,351 to 32,028. Of the seven thousand new workers, about four thousand were Jewish.⁴⁶ After a short stopover at Vaivara, prisoners were distributed among different labor camps. Although the Baltic Oil management was looking forward to expanding its workforce, it was unsure about the capability of the Jews to perform physical labor.⁴⁷ Indeed, among the four groups of workers, Jews had the lowest efficiency rate. Obviously, undernourished, feeble-bodied Jews had the least strength, let alone experience, to work in oil-shale mines and refineries. After all, only a few Baltic Oil plants directly employed Jewish workers: a total of 850 Jewish men and 360 women made up 7.5 percent of the workforce.⁴⁸ In comparison, POWs, Estonians, and the so-called Eastern workers (*Ostarbeiter*) constituted 40, 32, and 11.5 percent, respectively. If the Germans had removed the Jews who worked in the mines, the output would have fallen by 5 percent. A similar move involving Soviet POWs would have sunk the production by 61 percent. By all accounts, OT and Baltic Oil preferred POWs to Jews. Nevertheless,

⁴⁵ Statistics derived from Dr. Baron Franz Bodman's reports, Estonian History Museum (hereafter: EAM), D 152/2/40. The English translations of all ten reports are available at USHMM. In his capacity as the camp's chief physician, Bodman played a major role in the so-called selections, that is, picking out prisoners for execution. According to survivors, in July 1944 Bodman signed the order authorizing the execution of 10 percent of the remaining Jewish population in each of the camps.

⁴⁶ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group "Work," review of war diaries for July 1–September 30, 1943, BA-MA, RW-46/755.

⁴⁷ Baltic Oil to Economic Staff East, August 8, 1943, ERA, R-187/1/6.

⁴⁸ Baltic Oil, employment statistics as of January 31, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/24.

the Economic Inspectorate positively evaluated the Jews' overall work capacity. When working under proper supervision, Jews were said to be diligent and reliable laborers.⁴⁹

It appears that at least in the beginning, Jewish slave laborers were enough to satisfy the growing needs of the "mammoth concern," as the Germans dubbed Continental Oil Ltd. By November 1943 Estonia reported the lowest demand for workers in the Baltic. The higher the number of Jewish, POW, and "Eastern" slave laborers in the Baltic industry, the more Estonians and Latvians could be relieved of work duty and subsequently sent to the front to fight the Soviets. In Estonia, this gave the green light for mass conscription into the Waffen-SS Division.⁵⁰

The Dilemma of Evacuation

Jewish forced labor camps in Estonia had a much shorter lifespan than was initially planned. Steady Soviet advances made the Germans contemplate discontinuing synthetic oil production in Estonia. Whatever happened to Baltic Oil also affected the Jews. Running out of options, the Germans decided to hold on to Estonia for as long as possible. The agony lasted for a good half year and cost over a hundred thousand casualties on both sides. On January 20, 1944, the German Army began the retreat via Narva. In February 1944, the Army Group North implemented the "New-Year Vocation Plan." By February 27, the XVI Army had completed the withdrawal to the Panther Position.⁵¹

The Soviet offensive forced the Germans to make hard choices: should they stay to the last, securing the oil production so essential for the overall military performance, or should they pull out, having previously dismantled the equipment and thus saving it? By February 1, 1944, a demolition plan (*Sprengplan*) was in place for Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve, Kohtla, Kiviõli, Püssi, and Jõhvi-Ahtme. Nevertheless, the Army High Command decided to take the risk. On February 5, General Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel communicated Hitler's order to continue works at Kiviõli, Kohtla-Järve, and Jõhvi. Hitler prohibited the evacuation of the abovementioned

⁴⁹ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, Armament industry in the Ostland, report for September 1, 1941–August 8, 1944, BA-MA, RW-30/203.

⁵⁰ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, armament dep., overview of developments in armament industry in the fourth quarter of 1943, January 15, 1944, BA-MA, RW-30/9.

⁵¹ German 16th Army, draft war diaries, February 14 and 27, 1944, BA-MA, RH 20-16/351.

installations indefinitely; all previous deadlines stayed.⁵² Mineral Commando Estonia also stepped in by halting the transfer of workers from either Baltic Oil or its OT contractor. The columns of workers already on the march were to be returned immediately.⁵³

By mid-February, Soviet troops advancing from the south were poised to cut the railway line at Vaivara. Simultaneously, the Soviets attempted a landing at Mereküla, only a few kilometers to the north. The threat posed by the attack made the Army High Command order the Viivikonna mine and the Sillamäe refinery cleared.⁵⁴ The decision to remove *all* Jews from the shale oil region was made during the visit of Speer's representative, Dr. Böning, to Kiviõli on February 23. Six days later Böning discussed the plan of transfer with the Vaivara camp administration. Two Jewish columns, 2,500 people in each, were supposed to start marching across Estonia into Latvia. Negotiations continued in March, though without much success. The OT announced that it would continue using Jews on defense works until replacements were found. The OT would only let Jews go in exchange for 2,800 workers, preferably POWs. Meanwhile Baatz, the new commander of the German Security Police in Estonia, was requested to ensure the Estonian police battalions that guarded the Jewish camps remain in place.

By March the entire shale oil region was engulfed by war, yet as of March 19 Himmler had not yet granted permission to withdraw. On the very same day, and in violation of all previous agreements, the OT sent another three hundred Jews to build a fortification at Saka. The presence of the head of the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office, Oswald Pohl, at a meeting in Riga the following week did not produce the desired effect either.⁵⁵ The news that finally arrived from Riga on April 24 was rather discouraging: Berlin reconsidered the earlier plans to assign five thousand POWs to the Baltic Oil program. Jews were to stay, if only temporarily.⁵⁶ In spite of the initial setback, the Germans managed to put oil production in Estonia back on track. Indeed, except for a temporary draw-

⁵² Economic Staff Mussert to leader of Mineral Commando Estonia, February 5, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/7.

⁵³ Mineral Commando Estonia Stein to General Plenipotentiary for Labor Allocation Böning, February 1, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/24.

⁵⁴ Mineral Commando Estonia, general overview of the first quarter of 1944, January 1–March 31, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/757.

⁵⁵ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group “Work,” war diaries, February 15–March 25, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/757.

⁵⁶ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group “Work,” war diaries, April 24–30, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/758.

back in February, oil output remained stable or even increased slightly over the spring and summer months of 1944.⁵⁷ According to estimates, in 1944 Baltic Oil needed at least twelve thousand workers to manage all its mines and refineries effectively.

By early summer 1944, the situation with regard to manpower had become desperate. Instead of proceeding with the evacuation of Jews, Baltic Oil and OT were told to seek out more Jews if worse came to worst and no other workforce was available. The operation “Total War Effort” (*totaler Kriegseinsatz*) was in effect. As a result of the tripartite discussion between Vaivara, Baltic Oil, and OT in early June, the interested parties came out with a figure of six thousand. That is how many Jews were needed to keep the oil tap open. Aumeier promised to find the required number of Jewish slave laborers in the shortest time possible. Following the meeting, the parties went out to search for manpower, anybody they could lay their hands on.⁵⁸

Aumeier cast his eyes on Hungary and its Jews, who since May had been rounded up and deported. For the first time, a Jewish transport from Hungary came under consideration on June 6. Two days later, it was not yet clear whether the new arrivals would be POWs, Jews, or “Eastern” workers. On June 11, however, a train with five hundred Hungarian Jews onboard arrived at the Kiviõli station. Among other prisoners on that train was Lea Meiri from Kassa on the Slovakian border. She and other Jewish women had barely escaped death at Auschwitz, from where they were taken to Latvia. Half of the Jews stayed in Riga while the second half was sent farther north to Estonia.⁵⁹ Baltic Oil received information that the rest of the 3,500 Jews to arrive from Hungary would also be women. This was not exactly the kind of people Baltic Oil was looking for, namely miners, craftsmen, and metal workers.⁶⁰ The affair lasted less than two weeks. The SS kindly offered to bring more Jews from Hungary, but the Estonian Mineral Oil Commando declined the offer due to the low output of the women and inadequate supervision. Moreover, the Office of General Plenipotentiary for Labor Allocation had just “found” an additional three thousand POWs for Estonia. The second transport from Beszterce (Bis-

⁵⁷ Economic Staff East, monthly report, appendix 3, August 23, 1944, NARA, T-454/98.

⁵⁸ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group “Work,” war diaries, May 29–June 4, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/758.

⁵⁹ Testimony of Lea Meiri, Ber Sheva, February 16, 1967, German Federal Archives in Ludwigsburg (hereafter: BAL), 408 AR-Z 233/59, vol. 22.

⁶⁰ Baltic Oil, memo, June 2, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/33.

tritz; Bistrița), which was supposed to arrive in Estonia on June 24, went to Latvia instead.⁶¹ As regards the Jews from the first transport, Baltic Oil quickly discharged the women, who ended up cutting trees in the forest.⁶²

By mid-July there were still 3,744 Jews at four construction sites in Kiviõli, Kohtla-Järve, Ereda, and Kohtla. In fact, due to the relocation or complete withdrawal of POWs, the proportion of Jewish workers had even increased. Baltic Oil could no longer pursue the building program at Kohtla-Järve, for the workforce there was up to 60 percent Jewish. Taking into account that Jews made up 47 percent of the remaining workforce, whereas their productivity was 50 percent lower than the average, the management pronounced the Estonian shale oil industry extinct.⁶³ All non-Estonian workers, including Jews, were viewed as unreliable. Those who were reliable (i.e., Estonians and Germans) made up a mere 10 percent of the workforce.⁶⁴

Negotiations regarding the replacement of the remaining 4,500 Jews with POWs started in May.⁶⁵ By early August, Baltic Oil was ready to shift the Jews to East Prussia, but was waiting for a personal go-ahead from Hitler. About 2,050 Jews had already been moved to an area near Tallinn where they were waiting for the next available ship to take them to Stutthof concentration camp. The remaining 2,500 Jews were expected to arrive from the shale oil region shortly.⁶⁶ By this time, however, chaos was already settling in. In the span of a few days, several mutually exclusive orders arrived. On August 4, Speer sanctioned the redistribution of 14,000 Baltic Oil workers among the Army Group North, OT in East Prussia, and the so-called Geilenberg Program.⁶⁷ On August 9 the Army

⁶¹ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group "Work," war diaries, June 5–25, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/758.

⁶² Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel: Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2002), 382–83.

⁶³ Baltic Oil, memo, July 9, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/24.

⁶⁴ Office of Reich Commissar in the Ostland, III dep., Martin Matthiesen, note for Reich Commissar Lohse, July 7, 1944, Institute of Contemporary History in Munich (hereafter: IfZ), MA-793.

⁶⁵ Economic Inspectorate Ostland, armament dep., addendum to war diaries, May 1–7, 1944, BA-MA, RW-30/11.

⁶⁶ Mineral Commando Estonia, cable, August 8, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/67.

⁶⁷ Economic and Armament Office of the Army High Command, war diaries, August 4, 5, and 10, 1944, BA-MA, RW-19/203. Hitler introduced the Geilenberg Program (named after the general manager of the Braunschweig steelworks, Edmund Geilenberg) on May 30, 1944, with the purpose of protecting the ever-shrinking fuel production against the Allies' bombing raids.

Group North received Hitler's order halting the evacuation of the 4,500 Jews from Baltic Oil. At 11:30 am, however, Aumeier ordered the withdrawal of all Jews from the Baltic Oil installations by noon of the same day. Two days later, that is, on August 11, OT received confirmation that Hitler approved the removal of Jewish workers.⁶⁸ Indeed, by August 10 all remaining Jews in the shale oil region were concentrated in Kiviõli for the subsequent transfer to Tallinn, from which they were expected to continue to East Prussia. However, in the midst of preparations for the final deportation, on August 13 Economic Staff East communicated Hitler's order that brought the entire operation to a halt.⁶⁹

Taking into account that Romania was about to fall to the Soviets, one can understand why Hitler was reluctant to surrender yet another fuel-producing area. In order to increase its fuel supplies, Nazi Germany had to rely on synthetic oil production in Estonia.⁷⁰ It is clear, however, that by the last week of August 1944 Hitler made a final decision to terminate the oil program in Estonia.⁷¹ The decision was carved in stone: all 4,150 Jews from the shale oil region were to be shipped to the Reich. One of the largest transports carrying Jews and Soviet POWs departed from Tallinn on August 18. Five days later, all 4,408 prisoners reached their destination—the Stutthof concentration camp near Danzig (Gdańsk).⁷² The statistical report that OT sent to Baltic Oil on September 12, 1944, listed 8,114 workers, none of them Jewish.⁷³ By that time the only remaining Jews in Estonia were locked at the Lagedi and Klooga camps near Tallinn.

⁶⁸ Mineral Commando Estonia, phone conversation no. 1798, August 8, 1944; Baltic Oil, memo, August 9, 1944; instructions re. relocation of workers for/from the construction program, July 17–August 13, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/24; Baltic Oil, Schön to Economic Staff East, August 12, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/7.

⁶⁹ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group "Work," war diaries, August 6–13, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/759.

⁷⁰ Navu High Command, Karl Dönitz, memo, March 27, 1944, BA-MA, RH-19 III/15.

⁷¹ Fischer to Baltic Oil, Schön, August 30, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/7.

⁷² Lukáš Příbyl, "Die Geschichte des Theresienstädter Transports 'Be' nach Estland," *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (Institut Theresienstädter Initiative, 2001), 210.

⁷³ OT North-Russia to Baltic Oil, September 12, 1944, ERA, R-187/1/24.

Mass Execution at Klooga, September 19, 1944

As of June 1944 there were 2,168 Jews and 150 Soviet POWs at Klooga.⁷⁴ Camp inmates were engaged in building barracks and bunkers. Yet the main line of production at Klooga was underwater concrete signal mines, only manufactured in this camp. For obvious reasons, Klooga provided a much safer working environment than Tallinn, which was prone to Soviet air raids. Indeed, in August some production lines were moved from Tallinn to Klooga.⁷⁵

The mass execution of Jews at Klooga was not inevitable. Rather, the Nazis resorted to murder when they realized that the camp inmates could no longer be evacuated to Germany. Of all groups, Jews were the lowest priority. Around September 15 the Navy Commando at Klooga received the order to start packing their personal belongings in preparation for departure.⁷⁶ As of September 4, there was still space available on the ships bound for the Reich.⁷⁷ But the works at Baltic Oil and all its subsidiaries had to continue.⁷⁸

A deadly circle was slowly but steadily closing in on the Jews remaining in Estonia. On September 10 Baatz authorized the SS special commandos, in extraordinary cases, to carry out executions of prisoners without prior notice.⁷⁹ By mid-September the front at Tartu collapsed. On September 17 what until then had been an evacuation plan became an order. Estonia was to be cleared within the next two days, that is, by September 19. Baltic Oil said it needed up to three days to complete the withdrawal; however, there was no time left for bargaining. Army Group Narva provided Baltic Oil with nine trains, which then transferred the remaining eight thousand workers from the shale oil region.⁸⁰ Early in

⁷⁴ The list of Jewish prisoners reproduced in Zvika Dror, ed., *Klooga on the North: Testimonies of Survivors of a Concentration Camp in Estonia* (Kibutz Dalia: Ma'arechet, 1997), 65–126.

⁷⁵ Economic Commando Tallinn, situational report, July 30–August 28, 1944, BA-MA, RW-30/59.

⁷⁶ Interrogation of Wilhelm Föhles, Hüls, July 12, 1966, BAL, 408 AR-Z 233/59, vol. 17.

⁷⁷ Army Group North, daily report, September 4, 1944, BA-MA, RH-19 III/318.

⁷⁸ Army High Command, Armament Dep., war diaries, September 5, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/28.

⁷⁹ Commander of the German Security Police in Estonia Baatz to Special Commandos Hasselbach, Prellberg, and Buchner, September 10, 1944, ERA, R-59/1/69.

⁸⁰ Army Group North, daily reports, September 16–18, 1944, BA-MA, RH-19 III/318, 319; Economic Inspectorate Ostland, Armament industry in the Ostland, report for September 1, 1941–August 8, 1944, BA-MA, RW-30/203.

the morning of September 18 the Army High Command issued the order that put all means of transportation, first and foremost ships, at its disposal. A few hours later, Tallinn was sealed off by the military. By the evening of September 18 the Germans finished the demolition of the Kiviõli oil refinery.

What had until then worked for Jews now turned against them. Baltic Oil regarded Soviet POWs as better workers and therefore had no regrets letting the Jews go. When it became clear, however, that not everything and everybody could be saved from the sinking vessel called Estonia, the Germans went after the more valuable source of slave labor—the POWs. During the month of September the Germans managed to evacuate nearly all the POWs employed at Baltic Oil. A total of 22,500 POWs were driven from the mainland to the Estonian islands.⁸¹ By that time, the Jews had ceased to be a concern for anyone. In fact, they were expendable. At 10:09 pm on September 23, 1944, the last ship with German troops on board pulled out of Tallinn harbor. Reports on the evacuation did not mention Jews at Klooga.⁸²

Sometime after midnight on September 19, Dr. Franz von Bodman arrived at the German Security Police headquarters in Tallinn to discuss the Klooga issue. It did not take long to assess the situation: due to the transportation system breakdown and the rapid Soviet advance, it had become impossible to evacuate the Jews from Klooga. The decision was then made to execute them en masse. The execution order was to be implemented by a special SS commando, which immediately set out for Klooga.⁸³ The killing began at 2:30 pm and lasted until late into the night. When the Red Army entered Klooga on September 24, only 108 survivors came to greet them.⁸⁴ The number of dead can be estimated at 1,784, including 150 POWs.

⁸¹ Army Group North, daily report, September 27, 1944, BA-MA, RH-19 III/319.

⁸² Army Group North, daily reports, September 21–23, 1944, BA-MA, RH-19 III/319.

⁸³ Interrogation of Walter Schwarze, Berlin, April 8, 1947, BAL, 408 AR-Z 233/59, vol. 27.

⁸⁴ List of survivors at Klooga concentration camp, records of the Estonian SSR's Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes records, fall 1944, ERA, R-364/1/204.

Conclusion: Economic Calculus vs. Racial Ideology

The authors who have written on Jewish camps in Estonia agree that the *raison d'être* of the Vaivara camp system was exploitation of labor, not mass murder.⁸⁵ The explanation for the relatively high survival rate among Jewish prisoners can be found in a communication of the commander of the German Security Police in the Ostland Friedrich Panziger from February 19, 1944. Referring to the order from Friedrich Jeckeln, Higher SS and Police Leader in North Russia, Panziger unequivocally forbade the execution of prisoners. Panziger argued that prisoners constituted an important share of the workforce; furthermore, one could not have mass graves so close to the combat zone.⁸⁶

With the exception of individual cases of murder, until July of 1944 no mass executions of Jews took place in the labor camps in Estonia. In the summer of 1944 the SS carried out the so-called *10% Aktionen*, which did indeed decimate the camp population by one-tenth or more. This type of execution, however, was a standard, horrifying feature of the Nazi concentration camp system in the final years of its existence. Among the victims were mainly people incapable of performing physical labor, that is, the elderly, sick, and a few remaining children. Executions were routinely carried out by the SS camp personnel, who in the case of large-scale executions received assistance from local branches of the German Security Police.

Calculating the number of deaths among Jewish prisoners in Estonia is rather difficult. The problem is that we still do not know the exact number of Jews deported to Estonia from Lithuania and Latvia in the summer and fall of 1943. The number that is consistently mentioned in popular literature, based largely on survivor testimonies, is 20,000. Baltic Oil expected the arrival of 10,000 or 12,000 Jews. The head of the Vaivara camp administration Aumeier had on file a similar figure—8,900 (the number of Jewish slave laborers in Estonia in February 1944).⁸⁷ Of all high-ranking German officials in Estonia at that time, Vaivara Chief Physician von Bodman likely had the most precise data. The highest number of Jewish

⁸⁵ Västriik and Maripuu, "Vaivara Concentration Camp in 1943–1944," 738; Birn, *Die Sicherheitspolizei in Estland 1941–1944*, 182.

⁸⁶ Commander of the German Security Police in the Ostland Panziger to Einsatzkommando 2 Traut, February 19, 1944, IfZ, Fb-101/18.

⁸⁷ Mineral Commando Estonia, Group "TB," war diaries, February 16, 1944, BA-MA, RW-46/757.

prisoners appeared in his report from November 1943—9,207. To that number one should add at least 200 French and 500 Hungarian Jews deported to Estonia in May and June 1944, respectively.

Probably all the Hungarian Jews, but only fifteen French Jews, were evacuated to the Stutthof concentration camp. The ship that left Tallinn for Stutthof on August 18, 1944, had about 4,150 Jews on board. It was in Bodman's interest to downplay the number of deaths in Jewish forced labor camps in Estonia, and that is what he did. The ten reports that Bodman compiled between November 1943 and June 1944 displayed obvious inconsistencies: while the aggregate figure for Estonia stood at 1,423, statistics of individual Jewish camps added up to 1,711. Even more incredible is the information about the 1,500 Jews that had allegedly been shipped from Kiviõli and Ereda to Riga in February and April 1944. In the unlikely event that the sick and the children were indeed deported to Latvia, they stood no chance of surviving the war in any case. A conservative estimate of the number of deaths in Jewish forced labor camps in Estonia would thus be 5,572. Despite the staggering death rate, some 45 percent of Jewish inmates survived. This is a very high percentage indeed, taking into account how the Holocaust played out in other parts of occupied Eastern Europe. These Jews are a living testimony to the policy of "survival through labor."

Within the context of the Holocaust, Estonia constitutes an exceptional case, ridden with paradoxes. The first country in Europe proclaimed by the Nazis as *judenrein* (at the infamous Wannsee Conference in January 1942), Estonia became a dumping ground for Jews two years later. Between August and November 1943, ten times more Jews than were murdered in Estonia in late summer and fall 1941 were deported to the northernmost Baltic country from neighboring Lithuania and Latvia, but also from faraway France and Hungary. At the time when the Nazis were intensifying their efforts to annihilate the remaining European Jews at Auschwitz, Jewish transports from the dismantled Vilna and Kovno ghettos brought their inmates to relative safety to Estonia. As late as June 1944 a transport from Beszterce arrived in Estonia with five hundred Jews on board. As with thousands of their Baltic coreligionists before them, these Jews were expected to perform physical labor rather than to be killed outright. A possible explanation for this seemingly inexplicable detour in the Nazi policy of mass murder, which had been presented by some scholars as "cumulative radicalization," should account for both local peculiarities and central decision-making.

Unlike any other country of Nazi-occupied Europe, German officials in Estonia did not face the dilemma of making their realm free of Jews as

opposed to keeping a potential workforce alive. On paper, Estonia had long been swept clean of Jews. Therefore, no pressure from the central authorities in Berlin was to be expected. Having indicated that, historians who emphasize the role of racial ideology in Nazi decision-making vis-à-vis Jews may point out that the Czech and German Jews who were deported to Estonia in fall 1942 were all but few killed on the spot, as were the remaining Jews at Klooga in September 1944. Without disputing the preponderance of ideology, these two instances of mass murder also tell us something about the policy of "extermination through labor." Prior to the Battle of Stalingrad, the Nazis seem not to have considered the extensive use of Jewish slave labor. This, indirectly, contributes to the thesis advanced most forcefully by Christopher Browning, according to whom the Nazi decision to launch the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was taken in the euphoria of victory rather than in anticipation of military defeat.

One cannot otherwise explain Hitler's decision from August 9, 1944, to halt the removal of the remaining Jewish workers from Baltic Oil installations (even then, to Stutthof camp in Poland). From Hitler and Himmler to local German administrators and SS officials, none of them ruled out the exploitation of Jewish labor in the post-Stalingrad reality of Eastern Europe. When the survival of the Third Reich was at stake, ideology, if temporarily, gave way to pragmatism. To preserve the Jewish workforce in Estonia was to ensure the uninterrupted output of synthetic oil, which was crucial for keeping the German war machine operational. The massacre at Klooga, however, brings back the ultimate goal of the Nazis: after all is said and done, Jews remained the prime target group within Hitler's racial empire.

The example of Estonia further disproves Daniel Goldhagen's portrayal of the Holocaust as a straight line process.⁸⁸ At the same time, I would not go as far as Wolf Gruner, who concluded that "forced labor in the Third Reich cannot in any case be considered part of the Nazi murder program."⁸⁹ In a final analysis, ideology and contingency were complementary rather than mutually exclusive in the Nazi drive to destroy the Jews.

⁸⁸ Cf. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, esp. the chapters on Jewish forced labor and death marches, 284–415.

⁸⁹ Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor*, 289.

CHAPTER 8

Estonian Perpetrators of the Holocaust in the Annals of the Cold War: The Prosecution of War Criminals in the Soviet Union, 1943–1987

The Cold War came to epitomize the fundamental difference between the Communist and Western worldviews. The notion of *Socialist legality* was one among many other aspects of the Soviet system incompatible with basic democratic principles. At the same time, the prosecution of war crimes remained one of the few common grounds shared by the ideological adversaries. By partaking in a war crimes program, the Soviet Union not only joined the fold of international criminal law but also demonstrated its leadership. The Nuremberg Military Tribunal served as the best example of such international cooperation, albeit cooperation which did not last. From the outset the Soviet authorities used domestic war crimes trials as leverage against Western democracies. In the early 1960s, Soviet war crimes trials became an intrinsic part of ideological warfare. That pattern continued through the 1980s when the Chief Prosecutor's Office in Moscow committed to assist the U.S. Department of Justice in denaturalizing alleged war criminals who found refuge in the United States. While the Office of Special Investigation was mainly concerned with due process, the KGB sought to discredit the anticommunist forces. As far as the prosecution of war crimes was concerned, the Soviets were poised to win the Cold War. The rapid democratization of Soviet society, however, swiftly undid the ideological gains achieved by the Soviet Union in the international arena.

This chapter examines the political functions of the Soviet war crimes trials. Using Estonia as a case study, I seek to demonstrate how ideology affected the prosecution of war criminals in the Soviet Union. I look spe-

cifically at how Soviet authorities used the trials to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the West. Unwilling to recognize the Jews as a specific target of the Nazis, Soviet authorities nevertheless evoked the genocide at any opportune moment. The decision to cooperate first with the West German and later American judiciary was the result of a painstaking political calculation. When supplying documentary evidence to its Western counterparts, the Soviet Ministry of Justice—or actually the KGB—pursued a threefold objective: to present the Soviet Union as the major antifascist power; to blackmail the Americans of East European descent and thus to discredit the anticommunist doctrine; and finally to manipulate Western public opinion. Following a brief summary of the Soviet war crimes program during and shortly after the Second World War, I will highlight the particularities of the Soviet judicial procedure. Then I will analyze the war crimes trials that took place in Soviet Estonia in the 1960s. In the last part of the chapter I will discuss the Soviet contribution to the denaturalization trials that commenced in the United States in the early 1980s. My discussion focuses on changes in Soviet policy with regard to the prosecution of war criminals.

Soviets Take an Early Lead in the Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals, 1942–46

The Second World War catapulted the Soviet Union into the realm of international criminal law. Until then, the Soviet State had essentially remained outside the international legal system. If anything, the prosecution of class enemies during the preceding decade had greatly discredited Soviet justice. Under the threat of losing the war against Nazi Germany, Stalin was ready to depart, if only temporarily, from his stringent interpretation of Marxism. Thus, the regime lessened the pressure on the Soviet population while seeking contacts with the Allied countries. Faced with the unspeakable brutalities committed by Nazis and their collaborators, the population rallied around the communist regime. To maintain morale, as well as issue a warning to the enemy, in 1943 the Soviet government launched a domestic war crimes program. Not only were the Soviets the first to do so, but they were also the most consistent in following through on it. For the reasons I will outline below, the Allies were not very happy about the Soviet initiative, yet did nothing to subvert it.

International politics directly affected Soviet policy on the prosecution of war crimes. The Allies appeared reluctant to go beyond joint declara-

tions condemning Nazi crimes. British and American authorities met the initial Soviet push for war crimes trials with little enthusiasm. As a reaction to the Allies' decision to postpone the opening of the second European front, the Soviets demanded from the British that they try Rudolf Hess. The British refused, proposing instead a major trial after the end of the war. Strong words from Moscow arrived shortly after the British government announced in early October 1942 plans to establish a United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC). Stalin was apparently distressed that prior to the announcement, Churchill consulted with Roosevelt but not with him. An immediate start to the prosecution of Nazi criminals in the Allies' custody was the condition on which the Soviet Union was ready to participate in the work of the UNWCC. After a few months Moscow came up with more demands. This time Stalin pressured the British to allocate seven extra seats on the UNWCC to each of the western Soviet republics. In practice, this would have amounted to *de jure* recognition of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. The British did not yield to pressure, and so the Soviets withdrew their support from the UNWCC. As a counter move, however, on November 2, 1942, the Soviet government established the so-called Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascists Invaders and their Accomplices in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. The Extraordinary Commission would, then, submit incriminating evidence to Soviet military tribunals and, later, to a future international military tribunal.¹

The British and Americans opposed the idea of domestic war crimes trials in order to avoid potential reprisals against Allied prisoners of war held captive by the Nazis. Indeed, as soon as the Allied military administration in Italy issued a report on Nazi atrocities in Naples in the fall of 1943, Germany threatened to put on trial captured British and American POWs. For this reason, military tribunals planned by the Allied Armies in Sicily were instantly cancelled. The Soviets clearly did not share the same concerns: they were only too well aware of the systematic mistreatment and murder of Soviet POWs, to whom they had also refused any support.² Remarkably, the Soviet government continually stressed its adherence to

¹ Arie Kochavi, "Anglo-Soviet Differences Over a Policy towards War Criminals, 1942–1943," *Slavonic and East-European Review* 69, no. 3 (July 1991): 45–77.

² James Fussell, "Nazi War Crimes and Soviet Response: The First War Crimes Trial of World War II in Krasnodar, Russian Federation, July 14 to 17, 1943," unpublished paper (1991).

the international laws of war and therefore refrained from reprisals against German POWs. The policy of terror unleashed by the Nazis in occupied Soviet territory engendered a thirst for revenge among the general population. On April 19, 1943, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a decree that established the legal basis for the prosecution of Nazi criminals and their collaborators. The decree discriminated between Nazi war criminals and “traitors of the Motherland” among the local population. Two months later the first judicial application of the new decree took place in the city of Krasnodar in southern Russia.

Between June 14 and 16, 1943, eleven individuals stood trial on charges of high treason and collaboration with the German occupation authorities. The Krasnodar proceedings were the first public war crimes trial of the Second World War held by the Soviet Union, and also the first case brought by the Allied authorities in Europe. The trial received extensive coverage in the Soviet and Western media, including an abridged English translation of the transcript published by Hutchinson a year later. All of the accused pleaded guilty and were promptly sentenced: eight people received the death penalty while the other three were sentenced to twenty years of forced labor. When watching the original footage of the Krasnodar trial, one cannot escape the impression that this was a typical Stalinist show trial. Indeed, the defense blatantly refused to defend, the defendants readily confessed to the crimes, and “ordinary Soviet citizens” (apparently selected and coached beforehand) hysterically demanded the unmasking of the traitors.³ However, it would be a mistake to dismiss this and similar war crimes trials—as some authors do—as a mere exercise in Soviet propaganda.⁴ Although all the defendants at the Krasnodar trial were Soviet nationals, the main target of the attack was the Germans.⁵

³ *Krasnodar: The Trial of Krasnodar, 1943*, documentary by Irmgard and Berndt von zur Mühlen (Chronos Production, 1987), the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University. See also *The People's Verdict: A Full Report of the Proceedings at the Krasnodar and Kharkov German Atrocities Trials* (London and New York: Hutchinson & Co, 1944).

⁴ Ilya Bourtnan, “Blood for Blood, Death for Death: The Soviet Military Tribunal in Krasnodar, 1943,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 256–60.

⁵ Without overemphasizing the connection to the emerging Soviet narrative of the Second World War, yet another explanation is plausible as to why the defendants at Krasnodar were all Soviet citizens, not Germans. In 1948, Gorky Film Studio released a blockbuster, *Molodaia Gvardia* [The Young Guard], which told a story of an anti-German resistance cell in the city of Krasnodar. Teenage members of the cell were eventually delivered to the Nazis by a traitor and subsequently executed. The movie received a Stalin Prize, and the name of the main protagonist Oleg Koshevoi had since then been often bestowed on schools and youth groups.

As can be seen from the preceding description, the Soviets wanted first and foremost to bring German criminals to justice. At the time of the Krasnodar trial, however, most of them were beyond the reach of the Soviet judiciary. The indictment stated that the offenses committed by the accused were directly sanctioned and supervised by German officers. The defendants admitted that they joined the Germans voluntarily, thereby also implicating their Nazi superiors in the crimes. This was the prosecution's strategy, which aimed to prove that the torture and maltreatment of Soviet citizens by the German authorities was an integral part of a premeditated plan. Defense counsel stressed that the accused were nothing more than the executors of the criminal will of Hitler and his subordinates. The defendants used the same justification, if unsuccessfully, when pleading for clemency. Although the indictment imputed specific crimes to the accused, the court proclaimed them guilty of high treason—a provision of the Russian Penal Code inapplicable to members of the German Security Police or the Wehrmacht. By means of the Krasnodar trial the Soviet government effectively announced to the world that it would relentlessly track down and punish each and every Nazi war criminal.⁶

Without the participation of the Soviet Union, the UNWCC found itself in limbo. The Soviets came out on top once again at the close of the Moscow conference on November 1, 1943, when Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill signed a joint declaration. The document outlined the procedures for the future prosecution of Nazi war criminals, who were to be separated into major and minor offenders. Unexpectedly for the Western Allies, the Soviets used the Moscow declaration as a *carte blanche* for launching a series of domestic war crimes trials. Less than six weeks after the conclusion of the accord, the Military Tribunal of the IV Ukrainian Front in Kharkov tried three Germans and one Russian collaborator, thus establishing a judicial precedent. Disregarding the low profile of the defendants, they were charged under the decree of April 19, 1943, with executing thousands of civilians in gas vans, killing Soviet POWs, and destroying numerous cities. Like at Krasnodar, the indictment placed responsibility for the crimes at the door of the German government and the Army High Command. Furthermore, the prosecution collectively accused a number of SS and police units of complicity in these acts. The Kharkov trial, which was open to the public, received even greater publicity than that at Krasnodar. For that occasion, the authorities even flew in a group

⁶ George Ginsburgs, *Moscow's Road to Nuremberg: The Soviet Background to the Trial* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996), 46–48.

of foreign journalists. According to the Soviet press, the Kharkov-style trials were to be continued. However, the next major war crimes trial of Nazi officials (i.e., Friedrich Jeckeln, Higher SS and Police Leader in North Russia) did not take place until a year later—mainly out of deference to the Allies. Having closely observed all the necessary legal procedures, the Soviets were pleased with the response that the Kharkov trial had received from Western observers, including the American Ambassador to Moscow Averell Harriman.⁷

As far as the policy on the prosecution of war criminals was concerned, Stalin's change of heart could not be more dramatic. At Teheran in November of 1943, Stalin allegedly suggested the physical liquidation of the German officer corps. A year later, however, he surprised Churchill by arguing in favor of legal investigations. It was Roosevelt who warned against turning the proposed international military tribunal into too much of a judicial procedure, while Stalin emphasized that the Nuremberg trial should be more about justice than politics.⁸ The major problem of Soviet justice, and for that matter of the Soviet State generally, had always been the tendency to look at criminal acts through the prism of ideology.

The earlier Soviet war crimes trials displayed all the characteristics endemic in the Soviet justice system. Those characteristics persisted until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviets energetically supported the principle of extradition of war criminals, bargaining for its inclusion into the charter of the UNWCC. (The extradition clause was attached to the 1937 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism, which the Soviet Union never ratified.) This made it easier for Soviet legal authorities to avoid drawing a distinction between the exercise of international and national jurisdiction. The Soviet government repeatedly emphasized that, when prosecuting local perpetrators, it had acted under existing international treaties, inviting its Western counterparts to do the same. Early during the war the Soviets introduced the concept of criminal conspiracy to wage aggressive war. Consequently, any individual who belonged to an organization designated as criminal was deemed to be guilty by default. These two principles were first applied to Germans at all levels of authority, but occasionally to local collaborators who stood trial on charges of high treason. As indicated ear-

⁷ Ibid., 49–56; Arieh Kochavi, "The Moscow Declaration, the Kharkov Trial and the Question of a Policy on Major War Criminals in the Second World War," *History* 76, no. 248 (October 1991): 401–406.

⁸ Kochavi, "The Moscow Declaration," 411–12, 416.

lier, individuals accused of war crimes were routinely sentenced under Article 58-1 and 58-1a of the Russian (or respective Soviet Republic) Penal Code, which covered “counterrevolutionary” acts and “treason against the motherland.”

However, the Soviet Union did not hold the exclusive right to the above-mentioned legal practices. For instance, the French judiciary sentenced individuals to death for treason and crimes against the French nation. That constituted the basis for an indictment that a French military tribunal in Algeria filed in March 1944 in the case of the Minister of the Internal Affairs of the Vichy government, for example. Similarities arise from the fact that France and the Soviet Union both practiced civil law (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon countries which practice common law).⁹ Unsurprisingly then, French and Russian judges often worked hand in hand on certain legal issues during the Nuremberg Tribunal.¹⁰ The very principles of aggressive war and criminal organization were incorporated into the Nuremberg Charter thanks to an American lawyer Murray Bernays. The proposal sent for the U.S. President’s consideration in November 1944 effectively seized upon the legal innovations introduced by the Soviets at Krasnodar and Kharkov a year earlier. The United States and Britain left Nuremberg with the idea that one could successfully negotiate with the Russians. In his article published five years after the unofficial beginning of the Cold War, Sidney Alderman wrote:

For these reasons we never had any acrimonious debates. There were no attacks or even insinuations by any one delegation against the motives, views or contentions of the others. . . . The Russians were second to none in politeness and tact. They were characteristically stubborn on any matter on which they took a definite position or on which apparently they were under instructions from Moscow.¹¹

In reality, the “spirit of harmony,” as extolled by some American commentators, never penetrated the Kremlin’s corridors. As Francine Hirsch has recently argued on the basis of Soviet documents, the Stalinist regime envisaged the Nuremberg Tribunal as an exercise in didactical legalism not unlike the notorious show trials in Moscow ten years earlier.

⁹ Ginsburgs, *Moscow’s Road to Nuremberg*, 76, 107.

¹⁰ Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 306.

¹¹ Sidney Alderman, “Negotiating on War Crimes Prosecutions, 1945,” quoted in Michael Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945–46: A Documentary History* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), 50.

The Soviets made a significant effort to control its legal team at Nuremberg and the course of the trial. In the process, however, the Soviets ceded ground to the Americans, exposing deficiencies in communist propaganda and hardening the Kremlin's position vis-à-vis the West.¹²

Counterintuitively, the most important Soviet official at Nuremberg was not Chief Prosecutor Roman Rudenko but Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky, who officially had no business with it whatsoever. Vyshinsky was appointed head of a secret state commission supervising the work of the Soviet delegation. According to Arkady Vaksberg, Vyshinsky reveled in his new appointment bridging law and diplomacy. The commission's main objective was to prevent discussion of any aspects of Nazi-Soviet relations in 1939–41, specifically the acts emanating from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.¹³

The Soviet contribution to the International Military Tribunal was effectively defined by the Vyshinsky Commission, which monitored staff, coached witnesses, screened evidence for use in the trial, and edited draft speeches. The actual texts were approved at the highest level by Molotov and Stalin. No matter how hard the Soviets tried to script a story of good versus evil focusing exclusively on Nazi crimes, their strategy backfired. Particularly after Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech on March 5, 1946—which metaphorically placed the Soviets in the dock with the Nazis—the Vyshinsky Commission urged Rudenko to pinpoint in his upcoming closing speech "fascist ideology" as the root cause of Nazi crimes. The widening gap between the wartime Allies became apparent when the British and Americans effectively defied the Soviet list of hot-button topics by enabling the German defense to confront the prosecution on the issue of Katyn. In retrospect, Moscow committed folly by implicating the Germans in the mass execution of some 14,587 Polish prisoners of war at Katyn and few other sites in April 1940—actually proposed by NKVD head Lavrentiy Beria and sanctioned by Stalin.¹⁴

¹² Francine Hirsch, "The Soviets at Nuremberg: International Law, Propaganda, and the Making of the Postwar Order," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (June 2008): 702–703, 711–12, 726–27.

¹³ Arkady Vaksberg, *Stalin's Prosecutor: The Life of Andrei Vyshinsky* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 258–61. See also Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*, 211.

¹⁴ Hirsch, "The Soviets at Nuremberg," 712–27. On the Katyn massacre see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* 133–38.

War Crimes Trials in Estonia in the 1960s and Soviet Policymaking

When it comes to the idea of a fair trial, the difference between Western and Soviet legal systems could not be bigger. The practice of trials in absentia—with Leon Trotsky as the most prominent defendant—was widespread in the Soviet Union. Military tribunals, and later regular courts, preferred hearsay to documentary evidence when establishing the guilt of individual perpetrators. Judges, who often acted as the prosecution, rarely differentiated between accomplices and instigators of crimes. Defense council played only a symbolic role in the Soviet legal proceedings, limiting itself to enumerating the “mitigating circumstances” in which the crimes had been committed. In war crimes cases, defense lawyers routinely excused themselves by referring to the scope of brutalities and the amount of evidence that supposedly made the latter an “indisputable fact.” In the Soviet system, police investigation superseded judicial investigation in importance. Indictment was based on evidence obtained in the pretrial interrogations. The outcome of the trial was thus predetermined before it had even begun. At the same time, as Alexander Prusin has concluded, the war crimes trials were conducted in accordance with the Soviet definition of legality, that is, without violating any existing legal norms.¹⁵

The roughly 2.5 million people sentenced by Soviet military tribunals during the war were tried in closed sessions without much regard to public opinion at home or abroad. Of that number, less than one-third of the defendants were charged specifically with war crimes.¹⁶ It was not any different in Estonia. During fall and winter of 1944 the Soviet authorities arrested close to 4,500 people in Estonia. Another ten thousand were arrested in 1945. By 1949 the number of people arrested on political charges reached twenty thousand.¹⁷ From the very beginning, the Soviets displayed a tendency to prosecute the war crimes committed by native auxiliaries in Estonia proper. Hence the investigation files for the members of

¹⁵ Alexander Prusin, “‘Fascists Criminals to the Gallows!’ The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945–February 1946,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 2, 21.

¹⁶ Ginsburgs, *Moscow’s Road to Nuremberg*, 41.

¹⁷ Meelis Maripuu, “Faktide ja propaganda vahel: KGB ja kompartei inimsusevastaseid kuritegusid uurimas (1960–1980. aastad) [Between facts and propaganda: KGB and the Communist Party investigating crimes against humanity, 1960–1980],” paper delivered at the conference, “Modern History in Baltic and European Context,” Tallinn, March 30, 2005. See also Maripuu, “Zur sowjetischen Wahrnehmung der Juden in Estland in den Jahren 1944–1963,” 86–97.

Omakaitse tended to be significantly larger than for those of the Estonian police battalions deployed in Russia and Belorussia. In the latter case, indictments based on guilt by association were more frequent and interrogations more superficial.¹⁸ War crimes investigation in Estonia slowed down significantly following the mass deportation of March 1949, and almost ceased after Stalin's death four years later. The amnesty of October 4, 1955, which extended to wartime Nazi collaborators, did not have the same effect in all Soviet republics. The pursuit of war criminals continued almost uninterruptedly in western Ukraine, Lithuania, and to a lesser degree in Latvia, largely because of the anti-Soviet guerilla movement in those regions. When trying the apprehended guerillas, Soviet authorities sought also to incriminate them in wartime atrocities.¹⁹ In Estonia, however, armed resistance was less intense than in other western borderlands and therefore was put down much earlier. The war crimes trials resumed in the early 1960s.

In Estonia, two major war crimes trials took place in March 1961 and January 1962 respectively. The main charge against the four people who stood trial in Tallinn—Ain Ervin Mere, Alexander Laak, Ralf Gerrets, and Jaan Viik—was their partaking in the mass murder of the Jews who arrived in Estonia from Theresienstadt and Berlin in the early fall of 1942. Out of 2,051 Czech and German Jews over 1,750 were executed on the spot and the rest confined in a concentration camp near the capital city of Tallinn. According to the available data only seventy-four Jews from the two transports survived the war. Mere, as the then head of the Estonian Security Police, supervised a mass execution. Laak served as commandant of the Jägala camp; Gerrets was Laak's deputy, and Viik a camp guard at the same facility. The Estonian personnel of the Jägala cordoned off the execution site and took the victims to the mass grave. Later in the camp, Laak, Gerrets, and Viik carried out smaller ad hoc executions of Jewish prisoners. The second trial dealt with atrocities committed in the Tartu concentration camp. Between July 1941 and summer 1942, about 3,500 people, including at least 135 Jews, were shot in an anti-tank ditch not far from Tartu. During the first few months of the camp's existence Ervin

¹⁸ Indrek Paavle, "Soviet Investigations Concerning the Activities of Estonian Defense Battalions and Police Battalions of the German Armed Forces in 1941–1944," in *Estonia, 1940–1945*, 877, 883.

¹⁹ In the case of public trials of the late 1940s and 1950s in Ukraine, Amir Weiner has stressed the function of communal policing. See Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 2 (June 2006): 35, 38–39.

Viks served as the head of the so-called Special Department that meted out individual death sentences, Karl Linnas and Juhan Jüriste held the positions of camp commandant and head of the guards respectively. All three individuals occasionally accompanied a firing squad to the site of execution, which they supervised. Much less public attention was given to the trials of members of Omakaitse, the Estonian auxiliary police force. Six policemen from Pärnu were sentenced to death in December 1962 and another three from Haapsalu in July 1967. Throughout the 1960s a renewed wave of public war crimes trials rolled over the entire Baltic region. Mass murder of Jews constituted an important part of the indictment against a group of Lithuanian collaborators sentenced in Kaunas and Vilnius in the fall of 1962. In March 1961 nine members of the XVIII Latvian police battalion stood trial for crimes committed against Jews in Slo-nim, Belorussia. One of largest trials of Latvian collaborators took place in Rēzekne in October 1965. The case revolved around the destruction of the Audrini village, whose population was summarily executed in January 1942.²⁰

The question of timing is important. Indeed, what made Soviet authorities return to the practice of public war crimes trials? There are three possible explanations. According to one hypothesis, the single factor that impacted the renewed effort of prosecuting war criminals in the Soviet Union was Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961. When looking at how the dramatic story of Eichmann's capture and his subsequent trial evolved, one cannot fail to see some parallel developments in the Soviet Union. The Israelis kidnapped Eichmann in Argentina on May 11, 1960. Two weeks later, Tallinn newspaper *Molodezh Estonii* published an article about the mass murder of Czech and German Jews in Estonia. On June 3 the Estonian KGB opened a criminal investigation, even though the basic facts of the massacre were known since 1944. The first public war crimes trial in Estonia took place between March 6 and 11, 1961; that of Eichmann began on April 2 and ended on August 14 of the same year.²¹ One of the defendants in the January 1962 trial, Ervin Viks, was repeat-

²⁰ Maripuu, "Faktide ja propaganda vahel"; Lukasz Hirszowicz, "The Holocaust in the Soviet Mirror," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941–1945*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey Gurock (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 41–42; Andrew Ezergailis, "The Holocaust's Soviet Legacies in Latvia," in *Lessons and Legacies V: The Holocaust and Justice*, ed. Ronald Smelser (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 273.

²¹ Maripuu, "Faktide ja propaganda vahel."

edly referred to in the local press as “Estonia’s Eichmann.” The comparisons stop there, however. Considering how independent a role the Soviet Union always played when it came to prosecuting war crimes, it is rather unlikely that the Soviets would have let Israel—consistently painted as an ideological adversary—pressure them on that issue. The Eichmann trial had a significant effect on Western public opinion. The Soviet population, however, was fed a different story; the authorities capitalized on the Eichmann case to send a message to West Germany. Leading Soviet newspapers accused the Konrad Adenauer government of harboring war criminals. An article in *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, entitled “The Traces Lead to Bonn,” charged several high-ranking German officials with having been implicated in Nazi crimes.²²

The Soviets attempted to influence the West German government to abolish its statute of limitations on war crimes, which was about to take effect on May 8, 1960. Yet the domestic war crimes trials in the Soviet Union did not begin in earnest until a year later. If the Soviet authorities really intended to challenge the German judiciary, one would expect domestic trials to have paid particular attention to German perpetrators, as was the case back in the 1940s. Instead, the public trials of the 1960s barely mentioned any Germans, creating an impression that the atrocities were conceived and carried out solely by indigenous agents. To give just one example: during the Mere-Laak-Gerrets-Viik trial in Tallinn in March 1961, the name of Heinrich Bergmann came up. Bergmann, who commanded the German Criminal Police in Estonia, was directly responsible for the murder of Roma in that country. Two days after the start of the trial, the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* carried an article, which among other names mentioned that of Bergmann. The Central Office for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg (*Zentrale Stelle*) immediately contacted the newspaper for more information, which it used five years later to launch a legal investigation into Bergmann’s activities in occupied Estonia.²³ If the Soviet legal authorities had been primarily interested in bringing this and other individuals to justice, they would probably have approached their German counterparts directly. Obviously, this was not their purpose. Nevertheless, West Germany became the first Western country to which the Soviet Union started providing legal assistance. To call it cooperation,

²² Reported in “The Soviet Press on Eichmann,” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 5 (August 1960): 3–4.

²³ Correspondence between German legal authorities and *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, March 10 and April 10, 1961, BAL, 7 AR-Z 233/59, vol. 5.

however, would be an overstatement. Rather, it was a one-way street: upon receiving a specific request, the KGB provided the Ludwigsburg Central Office with documents from Soviet archives. German lawyers actively used the Extraordinary Commission's records as well as war crimes trials transcripts, which they routinely certified as authentic. The Soviet judiciary, at the same time, did not rush to use evidence presented in West German courts to open new criminal cases at home. The underlining idea of the Soviets was: we will not surrender our right to decide who is guilty! From the late 1960s onward, the KGB regularly followed war crimes cases under investigation in West Germany, while blasting the Bonn government in the media for neglecting its solemn duty to prosecute war criminals.²⁴

There are reasons to believe that the decision to relaunch the war crimes program in the 1960s had more to do with domestic politics. In accordance with Article 48 of the Russian Penal Code, no capital sentence could be imposed fifteen years after the crime was committed. That would effectively rule out the death penalty in the war crimes cases tried after May 1960. Until the enactment of the Principles of Criminal Legislation in 1958, individuals accused of high treason were prosecuted by the Soviet security police (GPU, NKVD, and later KGB) under decrees from the 1920s and 1930s. Hence was the transition from military tribunals to regular courts.²⁵ As I am going to demonstrate, however, that did not mean that the KGB was no longer involved in war crimes investigations. The KGB followed the guidelines of the Soviet Communist Party, which pledged to continue the struggle against so-called bourgeois nationalism. In 1959 the Presidium of the Communist Party Central Committee issued a directive calling for the destruction of anti-Soviet émigré centers. The first public war crimes trial in Estonia allows us a glimpse into the interaction between the KGB and the Communist Party.

The Estonian KGB and the Prosecutor's Office initially proposed to the Presidium of the Estonian Communist Party (EKP) Central Committee to start preparations for a trial. In early December 1960, the EKP First

²⁴ With regard to the prosecution of war crimes, West Germany was the favorite target of *Krokodil*, Soviet magazine of humor and satire. For example, in March 1963 *Krokodil* published a cartoon titled "In a Courtroom in Bonn." Upon the question of the Judge, what he was doing under Nazism, the defendant answered: "I carried out your decisions, Herr Judge!" From September 1961 comes a drawing of a panel consisting of seven judges—all of them Hitler look-alikes.

²⁵ Ferdinand J. Feldbrugge, "War Crimes in Soviet Criminal Law: A Propos the Lukianoff Case," *Review of Socialist Law* 10, no. 1 (1984): 295–97.

Secretary asked the Central Committee in Moscow for permission to stage a public trial, and charged the Supreme Court of the Estonian SSR with its organization. The EKP then instructed the Estonian State publishing house to print a collection of materials pertinent to the criminal case (ten thousand copies were to be ready for distribution by the time of the trial). Consultations between the KGB, the Supreme Court, and the Prosecutor's Office determined the names of the defense lawyers. On February 1, 1961, the EKP received a final draft of the indictment. Three days later, the EKP requested approval from Moscow for the trial. In his request the EKP First Secretary argued that the forthcoming trial would benefit the international standing of the Soviet Union, by undermining the position of the Western governments that had supported East European émigré organizations. Based on previous positive experiences, he insisted, efforts to compromise the émigré leaders should be renewed.²⁶ The Soviet tactics were as simple as they were effective.

Of the seven defendants who stood trial in Tallinn and Tartu in 1961 and 1962, only three were physically present in Estonia. The rest were living abroad: Viks in Australia; Mere in England; Linnas in the United States; and Laak in Canada (Laak committed suicide when he learned that the Soviets were after him). While the early Soviet war crimes trials did not address Western governments directly, those of the 1960s delivered a clear and powerful message. That message ran through each and every piece of propaganda that the Soviets circulated in connection with those two trials. Particularly striking proved the relevant newsreels and documentaries released in Soviet Estonia in 1960 and 1961. The Soviet propaganda drew a connection between the defendants in war crimes trials and the high-ranking Estonian officials who had fled to the West in the wake of the Soviet takeover in 1944. Video and audio images left no doubt as to the collective identity of the masterminds of the monstrous crimes committed during the Nazi occupation—Estonian bourgeois nationalists! Former leaders of the Estonian puppet government under the Nazis, now hiding abroad, were therefore to be punished along with the actual perpetrators. Indeed, Soviet filmmakers told the audience that the leaders of various émigré organizations were the very same individuals who implemented the policy of mass murder. Capital punishment for the accused thus served as a warning to all those Estonian nationalists residing abroad. Western governments, however, refused to extradite war criminals. (narrators specifically mentioned the United States, United Kingdom, Canada,

²⁶ Maripuu, "Faktide ja propaganda vahel."

Australia, Sweden, and Iceland.) This was because “fascists in the west were planning new mass graves,” because the cold warriors, under the cover of NATO, were seeking *revanche*. The films typically ended with a call upon the Soviet population to “be watchful.”²⁷

The above portrayal of war crimes trials had three distinct elements: the accused were depicted as representatives of the interests of the nationalist bourgeoisie; émigré nationalists were revealed as criminals; the West was accused of using those individuals in a Cold War against the Soviet Union. The 1960s trials displayed a line of argument similar to that introduced by the Soviets in the 1940s, except that the focus of the legal investigation now shifted from Nazi German perpetrators to local collaborators. At Krasnodar and Kharkov the Soviet authorities argued that the perpetrators were part of a larger criminal system, thus implicating the Nazi regime as such. At Tallinn and Tartu both prosecution and defense lawyers insisted that the twenty-odd years of Estonia’s independence had turned the defendants into killers. The implication was that by annexing the Baltic states in 1940 the Soviet Union put an end to a violent political system that had corrupted its own citizens. At the same time, Moscow effectively used the war crimes trials to strengthen its ideological position in the Cold War. The media was one of the Soviets’ main weapons. Consider, for example, the following not unimportant nuance. Both trials were accompanied by an exhibition, consisting of photographs and documents related to the court proceedings. Among the documents on display, there was a decree from winter 1941 that authorized police surveillance of American and British citizens residing in Nazi-occupied Estonia. Obviously, this particular document had no connection whatsoever to the criminal acts under investigation. So why was it there, then? *Rahva Hää*—an official organ of the EKP—explained that the governments of the United States and Australia, under whose protection Linnas and Viks presently lived, needed to know how those very murderers had treated their own respective citizens. During the 1940s and 1950s only the Soviet (and occasionally other socialist bloc) journalists were admitted into the courtrooms. That now changed. On the last day of the Tartu trial in January 1962 the authorities permitted a delegation of the Australian Communist Party to

²⁷ *Kalevi-Liiva süüdistab* [Kalevi-Liiva accuses], newsreel 39 (September 1960); *Kalevi-Liiva mälestuskivi* [Monument at Kalevi-Liiva], newsreel 46 (November 1960); *Nad pääsesid surmalaagrist* [They escaped from a death camp], newsreel 9 (March 1961); *Kalevi-Liiva süüdistab* [Kalevi-Liiva accuses] (1961), Estonian Film Archives, 1272, 1279, 1294, 1436.

observe proceedings. Along with the transcript of the trial, *Rahva Hää* painstakingly recorded how the trial was covered in the Western press. One of the defense lawyers explicitly stated that the trial had become the object of public attention in both socialist and capitalist countries. More important, the way the Western media reported on the trials was close to that intended by the Soviets.²⁸

To get the kind of response they anticipated, the Soviets had to put on quite a bit of a show. Indeed, procedural part of the trials sometimes smacked of the Stalinist show trials of the 1930s. As I mentioned earlier, of the three defendants who were supposed to appear in front of the judge in Tartu, only one, Gerrets, was in the dock. The missing two, Linnas and Viks, were nevertheless assigned chairs and microphones in the courtroom, “so that people in the United States and Australia would be able to hear about their crimes.” The NKVD investigators learned of Linnas’ role in the mass executions at Tartu concentration camp as early as October 1944. That begs the question, why then did it take almost eighteen years to put Linnas on trial? The Soviet authorities could arguably not locate all the defendants; there is no evidence that they ever tried to. That may lead to the conclusion that this and similar trials were a sham. Indeed, that is what many Western observers and East European émigrés claimed. They were mistaken: the individuals who stood trial did indeed commit crimes, if only with different motives from those imputed by the Soviets. A careful analysis of the pretrial investigation, pitched against wartime documents and eyewitness testimonies taken later in Germany and Israel, demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that the accused had indeed perpetrated the criminal acts for which they were indicted.²⁹ Although the KGB knew about the perpetrators and their whereabouts fairly well, it did only pull them out of a hat (like a magician) when it was opportune. To paraphrase Luc Huyse, Soviet war crimes trials were an example of political justice under the rule of law.³⁰

Representation of the Holocaust in public war crimes trials held in Estonia in the 1960s was fairly standard for the Soviet Union at that time,

²⁸ *Rahva Hää*, March 7, 8, 10, and 12, 1961, January 19 and 21, 1962.

²⁹ Mere-Laak-Gerrets-Viik trial records, June 1960–April 1961, USHMM, RG-06.026.12; Jüriste-Linnas-Viks trial records, November 1960–January 1962, USHMM, RG-06.026.11; Wilhelm Genth trial records, January 1969, BAL, 408 AR-Z 233/59.

³⁰ Luc Huyse, “The Criminal Justice System as a Political Actor in Regime Transitions: The Case of Belgium, 1944–50,” in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath*, ed. Istvan Deak, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 169.

except for two aspects. The Tallinn trial focused almost exclusively on the fate of Czech and German Jews deported to Estonia. Unusual for Soviet war crimes trials, up to fifteen survivors traveled to Estonia from Czechoslovakia to testify. Six of them later presented their testimonies publicly. While it was customary in the Soviet Union to place Holocaust survivors in the category of “peaceful Soviet citizens,” on this occasion, in a similar fashion, the court referred to the witnesses as “Czechoslovak citizens.” Nonetheless, the ethnic identification of the victims did make it into the trial proceedings. The audience in the courtroom—otherwise rather apathetic—was evidently moved by the stories of mass executions of Jewish and Roma children. Since only Jewish and Roma children (but not, for example, Russian children) were murdered, their ethnicity was explicitly mentioned. Remarkably, the destruction of the Roma minority in Estonia overall played a relatively important role in both pretrial investigation and the actual trial.

Soviet-American Legal Cooperation in the 1980s: A Public Relations Victory for Moscow

Although the free world heard the message it was not eager to respond. Thus, Soviet requests to extradite war criminals were routinely rejected or ignored. Western governments refused to cooperate, referring to the absence of a legal assistance treaty with the Soviet Union. The prosecution of war crimes, measured by the absolute numbers of public trials, peaked in the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1967. In the 1970s, however, corruption trials by and large replaced war crimes trials as one of the means by which the ruling Communist Party exercised its political authority.³¹ It was not until 1980 that war crimes trials once again started to loom large on the Soviet foreign policy agenda. This development was triggered, rather unexpectedly, by a new piece of legislation passed by the United States Congress in 1979.

In March 1979, Congress voted to establish a special war crimes unit within the U.S. Justice Department. The Office of Special Investigation (OSI) took over cases of alleged Nazi war criminals that had found refuge in the United States. For a variety of reasons, it was decided that the OSI would pursue civil and not criminal cases. OSI lawyers went to court to

³¹ Louise Shelley, “The Political Function of Soviet Courts: A Model for One Party States?” *Review of Socialist Law* 13, no. 3 (1987): 273–74, 280–81.

strip the war criminals of American citizenship and subsequently deport them. The American legal system enabled defendants to file as many as fourteen separate appeals, which could take up to eight years or more in litigation. In order to revoke someone's citizenship, the U.S. government needed to prove that they had lied on their immigration papers. (For example, somebody might have claimed that he was a farmer during the Second World War, but in fact he had served in a German-organized police force.) The major problem the OSI faced was obtaining documentary evidence that would expose such a lie. The majority of alleged war criminals under investigation were not German Nazis but East European collaborators, especially from the westernmost Republics of the Soviet Union. Yet there was no mutual assistance agreement on legal matters between the two countries and the Soviet archives remained off limits to Western researchers. The Americans had no choice but to approach the Soviet authorities. To be successful, the OSI had to rely on the goodwill of their Soviet counterparts.

On January 27, 1980, a two-man delegation from the U.S. Justice Department traveled to Moscow to meet with the Soviet Prosecutor General, Roman Rudenko. The significance of the visit is difficult to overestimate. American-Soviet relations were at their lowest ebb for some time when Allan Ryan and Walter Rockler arrived in Moscow—one month after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and a few days after Andrei Sakharov had been exiled to Gorky. The OSI lawyers refused to follow the advice of the U.S. Department of State, which wanted them to express the American government's disapproval of the Soviet aggression against Afghanistan; they came to do business with the Soviets, whose willingness to cooperate came as a pleasant surprise. At the height of the Cold War, both sides immediately found common ground: the participation of the United States and the Soviet Union in the fight against Nazi Germany and later in the prosecution of major Nazi war criminals. Coincidentally, both Rudenko and Rockler had been involved in the Nuremberg Military Tribunal. Indeed, during the war crimes trials of the 1960s the Soviet press often quoted Robert Jackson, American Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg. When sitting and talking in Moscow in the winter of 1980, the two parties might have felt indeed that the 1940s spirit of cooperation had returned. The Americans received more than they bargained for. They just did not realize that the gentleman's agreement they hammered out in Moscow was the result of careful calculation on the part of the KGB.

According to the Moscow agreement, the Soviet authorities pledged to provide the U.S. Department of Justice with incriminating evidence

against particular individuals on the OSI list. Documents were supplied through the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC as American investigators continued to be denied direct access to the Soviet archives. OSI lawyers received the right to come to the Soviet Union and question eyewitnesses, but the Soviets refused to permit the latter to travel to the United States to testify. Evidence thus acquired (in the form of video depositions) would then be presented in American courts. Furthermore, the Soviets did what they had never done before: they allowed American defense lawyers to cross-examine witnesses. The most puzzling fact was that the Soviet side did not ask anything in return.³²

What the Americans did understand was that the Soviets, even in the upper echelons of bureaucracy, had no idea about Western concepts of justice. What they did not realize, though, was that by cooperating with the Soviets they actually provided grist for the communist propaganda mill. The Soviets found themselves in a situation in which they could not lose. Communist propaganda continued criticizing the American legal system, notwithstanding the unofficial understanding reached by the two ministries of justice. Any objection to this unfair practice would have inevitably provoked Moscow to withdraw its commitment. When the OSI failed to denaturalize and deport a war criminal, the Soviets argued that the American government had connived with the latter. If a war criminal was finally stripped of his citizenship and, in rare cases, deported, the Soviet side naturally took credit for it (that is, we have been telling you all along that they deserved punishment!). Between 1981 and 1986 the Soviet courts tried sixty Nazi collaborators; the OSI investigated almost as many cases during the same period.³³

The greatest of all achievements of the Soviet propaganda machine was winning over a substantial segment of the American population. Stories about war crimes printed in *Izvestia*, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, and *Literaturnaia Gazeta*—although in a different form and with a different emphasis—now appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Daily News*. Ordinary Americans started asking themselves questions: could it be that some individuals of East European descent, who posed as

³² Allan Ryan, *Quiet Neighbors: Prosecuting Nazi War Criminals in America* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 65–93.

³³ Mikhail Semiriaga, *Kollaboratsionizm: Priroda, tipologia i proiavlennia v gody vtoroi mirovoi voyny* [Collaboration: substance, typology, and manifestations during the Second World War] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), 781. As of January 1, 1985, OSI had forty-six cases under investigation (OSI Digest of cases, USHMM, 1997, A.0189/Box 8).

fervent anticommunists, were indeed war criminals? The U.S. government was portrayed as dishonest vis-à-vis its own citizens by having allowed persons with such a tainted past into the country.³⁴ That inevitably led to the conclusion that perhaps not every piece of information coming from the Soviet Union was blatant propaganda. Needless to say, this type of rationalizing sounded the alarm among East European émigrés, who were petrified at the prospect of being seen not as victims of communism but rather as Nazi collaborators. Americans of Baltic extraction in particular were apprehensive about the potential deportation of their countrymen to the Soviet Union, which they perceived as a violation of the principle of non-recognition. As a result, they refused to cooperate with the OSI in investigating war crimes. Émigré organizations and their supporters among rightwing American politicians and intellectuals put forward a list of violations of due process, which supposedly rendered what was dubbed “Soviet evidence” inadmissible in American courts.³⁵ For example, it was argued that the Soviets used prejudicial language vis-à-vis defendants, forged documents, coached witnesses, obstructed cross-examination, deliberately created a coercive atmosphere in which depositions were taken, and so on.³⁶ Upon close examination, with a few exceptions, the objections raised appear to have been nothing more than an exercise in rhetoric. American judges in most cases came to the same conclusion.

Scholars continue to debate as to what caused the demise of the Soviet Union. It is possible to argue that the state built on misinformation, withdrawal of information, or deliberate distortion of information, is generally doomed. This is why, when it came to the prosecution of war criminals, the Soviets nearly won the public relations campaign. On this issue—probably for the first time ever—Soviet propaganda was able to simply speak the truth instead of telling lies. However, the process of liberaliza-

³⁴ For the recent revelations regarding the use of alleged war criminals of East European descent by American intelligence agencies see *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis*, ed. Richard Breitman et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227–64, 443–45.

³⁵ For somewhat opposing views on the use of Soviet evidence in American courts and the reaction of Eastern European émigré organizations to denaturalization trials, see Ieva Zake, “‘The Secret Nazi Network’ and Post-World War II Latvian Émigrés in the United States,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 2010): 91–117; Jerome S. Legge, “The Karl Linnas Deportation Case, the Office of Special Investigations, and American Ethnic Politics,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 26–55.

³⁶ Paul Zumbakis, *Soviet Evidence in North American Courts* (Chicago: An Americans for Due Process Publication, 1986), 11–123.

tion within the Soviet Union made the country, as well as any of the gains it had made in international politics, obsolete. The prosecution of war crimes was one of many issues that had seen a dramatic change in popular reactions. In April 1987, after eight years in litigation, the United States deported Karl Linnaas to the Soviet Union, thus creating legal precedent.³⁷ The deportation occurred at the time when the policy of Glasnost was in effect. Ordinary Soviet citizens reacted to the fact of deportation by writing letters to the Supreme Court of the Estonian SSR. Some letters were written in a traditional Soviet language, demanding death to “fascist henchman” Linnaas. Yet this was just one of the many opinions expressed. While one citizen proposed to break the circle of violence by pardoning Linnaas, one other called for prosecution of the individuals involved in Stalinist deportations. There were also those who insisted that by bringing Linnaas to trial for the second time, the Soviet bureaucrats were actually trying to divert attention away from their own machinations.³⁸ Ironically, Perestroika made Soviet citizens question each and every aspect of the Soviet system, including the (halfhearted) effort to bring war criminals to justice.

Conclusion

As with the Soviet system as a whole, the prosecution of war criminals in the Soviet Union evolved from more oppressive to less oppressive. Thus, from the perspective of basic legal norms, war crimes trials conducted under Nikita Khrushchev in the 1960s appear far more advanced than those conducted under Joseph Stalin in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In spite of some similarities in form, Soviet war crimes differed significantly from the show trials of the 1930s. An overwhelming majority of Soviet nationals charged with war crimes did indeed commit atrocities. Therefore, there was no need to falsify incriminating evidence against individual defendants. One of the major weaknesses of Soviet justice (which is in fact a systemic failure) was its inability or even unwillingness to reasona-

³⁷ Linnaas was the first individual deported to the Soviet Union against his will. Fedor Fedorenko, who was deported from the United States in 1984, acquiesced to the fact of deportation.

³⁸ A total of seventeen letters is available. Soviet citizens' letters to the Supreme Court of the Estonian SSR, April 22–June 12, 1987, Mere-Laak-Gerrets-Viik trial records, ERAF, 129/28195, vol. 10.

bly establish the degree of individual guilt. In spite of the incompatibility between international legal standards and the Soviet legal system, Soviet trial records can be successfully used as an historical source, especially when pitched against other kinds of primary sources.

It would be an exaggeration to argue that the Soviet war crimes trial program was solely meant to be yet another front in the Cold War. To the contrary, prosecution of war criminals was one of the few aspects about which the Soviet and Western governments saw eye to eye. Due to the tremendous loss of life in the Second World War, the sympathetic Western public opinion of the Soviet sacrifice, and the overwhelming criminal evidence, the communist regime was willing to relent on the issue of ideology. Paradoxically, by seemingly depoliticizing the legal process, the Soviet authorities, the KGB in particular, were able to score points against Western democracies, which appeared to dither as far as the prosecution of war crimes was concerned. In retrospect, the Soviets pushed all the right buttons to appear righteous, and thus ultimately victorious, over their ideological adversaries: promoting accountability proved as good as advancing their own narrative. Although not universally accepted, the Soviet version of the Second World War held sway, a minor yet significant victory in the Cold War.

CHAPTER 9

Why the Holocaust Does Not Matter to Estonians

This chapter examines perceptions of the Holocaust in contemporary Estonia. To comprehend how Estonians have formed their views on the Holocaust is to understand how they conceive of their history. Whereas in Western Europe and North America the Holocaust is perceived as carrying a universalistic message, in Estonia and throughout Eastern Europe it is ultimately linked to the Jewish minority. Ultimately, whatever Estonians think of the Jews as a group translates into their perceptions of the Holocaust and vice versa. Therefore it is essentially impossible to discuss what the Holocaust means to Estonians without assessing the levels of antisemitism in Estonian society today.

Unlike in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania, the Nazi mass murder of Jews has never become a subject of debate in Estonia. Most Estonians think of the Holocaust as a superimposed discourse that has no direct connection to their country. The lack of interest can be attributed to several factors. As far as Jewish history is concerned, Estonia is indeed a marginal case. The Estonian Jewish community was small and inconspicuous. Even more significant, the Holocaust played out differently in Estonia than elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. The implementation of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” in Estonia was witnessed by relatively few people. The Soviet investigation of war crimes committed in Estonia paid only limited attention to the plight of the Jews. Even then, both the media and witnesses routinely portrayed Jewish victims as peaceful Soviet citizens murdered by German fascist invaders. These perceptions carried over into the post-1991 period.

Peculiarities of the Holocaust in Estonia

The Estonian case poses a challenge to the generally accepted view of how the Holocaust was carried out in Eastern Europe. Unlike in Latvia and Lithuania, there were no anti-Jewish pogroms or ghettos; no death

squads staffed and sometime managed by natives, like the Arājs Commando in Latvia or the Hamann Commando in Lithuania. The daylong mass executions of Jews at the IX Fort in Kaunas or Rumbula near Riga did not happen in Estonia until a year later. Due to fierce Soviet resistance, roughly two-thirds of Estonia's Jews managed to escape to Russia in the summer of 1941. The remaining one thousand or so Jews were apprehended by the Estonian Security Police, which conducted a pseudo-legal investigation into each individual case. Thus, Estonia was spared the atrocities and public humiliation that accompanied the Nazi mass murder of Jews in other East European countries. Most Estonians, if they bothered to think of it at all, believed that justice had been served and that the executed Jews were punished for a reason.

The two Jewish transports that arrived in Estonia in September 1942 from former Czechoslovakia and Germany respectively had been diverted from Riga. Only a few local people witnessed Jews disembarking at a small railway station not far from Tallinn. Upon arrival, almost 80 percent of the Jews were executed by a special detachment of the Estonian Security Police. The rest of the prisoners, mainly young women, were later dispatched to Tallinn central prison. Finally, in September and October 1943, the Germans deported over 9,000 Jews to Estonia from the dismantled ghettos of Kaunas and Vilnius. While the extermination center at Auschwitz-Birkenau was working at full capacity, receiving Jews from all corners of occupied Europe, these Polish and Lithuanian Jews sent to Estonia were meant to live. Alongside Soviet prisoners of war, Jews worked in the oil industry and built defenses in northeastern Estonia. Jews were placed in nineteen slave labor camps in an otherwise sparsely populated area. Three hundred men from Estonian police battalions 287 and 290 guarded the perimeter of the camps. Otherwise, the camps were run entirely by the German SS, which, with a few exceptions, carried out the selection, individual killings, and mass executions of Jews that occurred during the summer and early fall of 1944. The largest single massacre on the territory of Estonia occurred at Klooga slave labor camp on September 19, 1944, and claimed the lives of 1,634 Jews and 150 Soviet POWs. The total death toll of Jews in Estonia in 1941–44 could be as high as 8,500, with a death rate of 63 percent. In Latvia, at the same time 65 percent, or 61,000, Jews perished. The death rate among Lithuanian Jews was the highest anywhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, 95 percent, or 195,000.

The Estonian Security Police had a mostly bureaucratic mode of operation, and for this reason it drew only limited attention from the Soviet legal

authorities. Furthermore, the commanding echelons of the Security Police and most of its rank-and-file fled to the West. When interrogating members of Omakaitse or police battalions, KGB investigators put emphasis on the killing of communists and Soviet paratroopers. In the public war crimes trials that were staged throughout the Baltic region during the 1960s, however, the mass murder of Jews played an important part. The four defendants who stood trial in Tallinn in 1961 (two of them in absentia) were implicated in the mass murder of Jews at Kalevi-Liiva in 1942, whereas the three individuals (of whom only one was present in the courtroom) on trial in Tartu a year later were charged with running a local concentration camp and carrying out mass executions of prisoners. Despite Soviet claims to the contrary, the majority of Estonian people had never embraced so-called socialist justice; the ovation with which the audience met the verdict—invariable death sentence—fell short of expectations.

The Nazi mass murder of Jews in Estonia lacks clear markers that would make it easier for common people to grasp. The 963 Estonian Jews murdered in 1941 and 1942 constitute slightly over 10 percent of the victims of the Holocaust in Estonia. The rest were Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Czechoslovakian, German, French, Soviet, and Hungarian nationals.¹ The physical space facilitating commemoration is missing in Estonia. One can visit the Maskavas neighborhood in Riga, Slobodka suburb in Kaunas, or the former Jewish quarters in Vilnius to see the places where the Jewish ghettos once stood. No such place exists in Estonia. The former Tallinn central prison where many male Jews were incarcerated prior to their execution in September 1941 had continuously existed as a penitentiary until December 2002 and thus remained off limits to visitors. Situated between farmlands, swamps and industrial zones, the sites of former Jewish slave labor camps gradually decayed into oblivion. Finally, exhibits, as a testimony to the crime, are hard to find in Estonia. Consider the following description of the pogrom that took place in Kaunas on June 25, 1941:

Women with children on their arms pushed their way to the front rows, while laughter and shouts of “bravo!” echoed to the sound of the iron rods and wooden clubs used to beat the Jews to death. At intervals, one of the killers struck up the national anthem on his accordion, adding to the festive mood of the day.²

¹ None of the eight Jews who were deported to Estonia from Finland in November 1942 held Finnish nationality.

² Quoted in Konrad Kwiet, “Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 14.

And then there are the visual images that can be neither denied nor easily forgotten. One photo depicts a healthy looking, blond Lithuanian with a crowbar posing next to the bodies of Jews whom he just had slain. Another photo shows a somewhat older man with rolled-up sleeves just seconds after he had struck a Jew lying on the ground. This did not happen in Estonia. There is no such striking evidence of the crimes committed. Instead, we can talk about a certain distance between perpetrators and victims. The way the Estonian Security Police handled the Jews more closely resembles the archetype of a desk murderer described in the 1960s by Raul Hilberg: those German bureaucrats who shuffled millions of people off to their deaths on paper, while sitting in the quiet of their Berlin offices.³

Independent Estonia lacked well-publicized war crimes cases such as those against Konrāds Kalējs in Latvia or Aleksandras Lileikis in Lithuania that sustained a public discussion on local collaboration in the Holocaust. The attempt to influence the Estonian authorities to prosecute former Estonian policeman Harry Männil (1920–2010), who became a successful businessman in Argentina after the Second World War, has failed miserably.⁴ Although the deportation of alleged war criminal Karl Linnas to the Soviet Union back in 1987 attracted much international attention, it is too distant a case to be remembered in today's Estonia. Furthermore, mainstream Estonian journalists and historians-cum-politicians such as Mart Laar have validated the émigré notion of both KGB war crime investigations and American denaturalization trials as a hoax.⁵ Unsurprisingly,

³ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (London, Lime Tree, 1993), 20–50.

⁴ Männil was one of several deserters from the Red Army hidden by a Jewish woman, Miriam Lepp, in the summer of 1941. She was executed on July 13, 1942. One can only speculate whether Männil as a policeman was aware of her arrest and whether he did anything to save her from death.

⁵ Cf. Virkko Lepassalu, “Kas eestlased olid massimõrvarid?” [Were Estonians mass murderers?], *Luup* 9 (May 4, 1998), 18–19; Peeter Kaldre and Virkko Lepassalu “Wiesenthal's vendetta: 7-aastane juut—ajakirjanduse ohver” [Wiesenthal's vendetta: A seven-year-old Jew as media's victim], *Luup* 12 (June 15, 1998), 18–19; Tiina Jõgeda, “Kuidas Tartu koonduslaagri ülemast Karl Linnasest nõukogude sõjatrofee tehti” [How head of the Tartu concentration camp Karl Linnas became a Soviet military trophy], *Kes/Kus* (2000); Tiina Jõgeda, “Mälul on rahvus” [Memory has an ethnicity], *Eesti Päevaleht*, March 21, 2001; Tiina Jõgeda, “Aeg sõjahaavu ei paranda” [Time does not heal war wounds], *Eesti Päevaleht*, March 22, 2001. Laar wrote that Tallinn police prefect Evald Mikson was not guilty (*Miksonil ei ole süüd*). In December 1941 the German Security Police arrested Mikson on charges of torturing prisoners and misappropriating their valu-

ordinary Estonians tend to share this view as well. They dismiss legal investigations of war crimes, arguing that the Soviets had already prosecuted all the individuals suspected of any wrongdoings. Those who at one time evaluate Soviet justice as fair, but at another reject it as biased, obviously do not see the contradiction in their judgments.

Estonian Historiography of the Holocaust

In marked contrast to Lithuania and Latvia, relatively little has been published on the Holocaust in Estonia since 1991. The first, and until recently the only, book on the mass murder of Estonian Jews was written in 1994 by the former deputy head of the Estonian Jewish community Eugenia Gurin-Loov. Essentially, it is a document collection supplemented by a brief history of Jews in Estonia and their destruction during the Nazi occupation. Gurin-Loov should be credited for discovering the investigation files of the Estonian Security Police, which provide a unique perspective on the extermination of Jews in Eastern Europe. At the same time she has unwittingly decontextualized the mass murder of Estonian Jews in 1941 by examining it in isolation from the rest of the story of the Holocaust in Estonia. Contrary to expectations, the pioneering study by Gurin-Loov has generated no debate. Financed by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York and the Estonian Jewish community, the book was available in just a handful of bookstores and has remained largely unnoticed. The only two reviews of the book in Estonian appeared in literary journal *Vikerkaar* and University of Tartu history journal *Kleio*, followed by two more reviews in English.⁶ Peeter Puide, an Estonian writer living in Sweden, has further explored the subject of collaboration in the Holocaust by using some of the documents uncovered by Gurin-Loov in his novel published in Stockholm in 1997.⁷ The novel has attracted considerable attention in Sweden, but not in Estonia.

ables. He was not released until two years later. The Estonian National Archives in Tallinn contain several documents from August and September 1941 with Mikson's signature authorizing the execution of individual Jews.

⁶ Peeter Puide, *Vikerkaar* 3 (1996): 79–83; Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Kleio* 19 (1997): 53–55; Dov Levin, *The Fate of the European Jews, 1939–45: Continuity or Contingency?*, ed., Jonathan Frankel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 297–300; Weiss-Wendt, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 193–95.

⁷ Peeter Puide, *Samuil Braschinskys försvunna vrede. Dokumentärroman* [Samuil Brashinski's lost wrath] (Stockholm, Norstedts, 1997).

The Estonian edition of the best-selling book by Stéphane Bruchfeld and Paul Levine, *Tell Your Children About It: A Book About the Holocaust in Europe, 1933–1945* (2003), features a fairly comprehensive chapter on Estonia. Sulev Valdmaa of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute in Tallinn who wrote the chapter did not shy away from discussing the issue of collaboration. Valdmaa approached this problem from a humanistic point of view, without resorting to moralizing. Numerous quotations from original documents further strengthened his argument. Perhaps the only statement in the book that cannot be corroborated is Valdmaa's claim that ordinary Estonians actively helped the Jews in peril.⁸ Tartu University professor Uku Masing and his wife Eha, whom Valdmaa has mentioned, are in fact the only two Estonians recognized by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem as Righteous Among the Nations. In comparison, the number of individuals who assisted Jews in Lithuania and Latvia is 807 and 139 respectively.⁹

In 2001 *Vikerkaar* printed a special issue dedicated to the Holocaust. Alongside excerpts from books by renowned authors such as Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Victor Klemperer, and Raul Hilberg, the journal featured two articles by Estonian historians. Meelis Maripuu and Riho Västriik provided an overview of the "Nazi Final Solution of the Jewish Question" in Estonia, paying particular attention to local collaboration. An extended version of the articles appeared five years later in English translation, in a volume published under the aegis of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity. Incredible as it may sound, the commission's reports, which appeared in 2006 in Tallinn under the title *Estonia, 1940–1945*, represent the first and only scholarly treatment of the Holocaust by Estonian historians.¹⁰

⁸ Stéphane Bruchfeld and Paul Levine, eds. *Jutustage sellest oma lastele: Raamat holokaustist Euroopas aastatel 1933–1945* [Tell about it to your children: a book about the Holocaust in Europe, 1933–1945] (Tartu, Israeli Sõbrad, 2003), 85–93.

⁹ Yad Vashem database of Righteous Among the Nations, available online at: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/search.html?language=en> (accessed May 11, 2015).

¹⁰ Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, and Indrek Paavle, eds., *Estonia, 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (Tallinn: Tallinna Raamatutrukikoda, 2006).

The Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity

The commission was convened in 1998, and was the first such body in the Baltic region, as has been repeatedly emphasized. The date is significant, as Estonia was entering talks with the European Union and NATO regarding membership in these two organizations. Brussels and Washington hinted that the chances of East European states becoming members would increase if they set their historical record straight, first and foremost the problem of indigenous collaboration in the Nazi mass murder of Jews. This is why the commission began investigating crimes committed in Estonia during German rule first, leaving the period of Soviet occupation for later. For the same reason, the reports have been translated into English. The full name of the working group, the Estonian *International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (italics added), is somewhat misleading. Among the six international members of the commission only three were historians, none of them an expert on either Soviet or Nazi policies. It was an open secret that they were selected on the basis of their “friendliness” toward Estonia. Furthermore, all of the research was carried out by a team of Estonian historians, mainly MA and PhD students, who were not officially members of the commission. Unlike the equivalent commissions in Lithuania and Latvia, which featured a mixture of local, émigré, and foreign scholars, the Estonian team consisted solely of Estonian nationals.

The volume looks impressive: 1,357 pages printed on high-quality paper with an excellent selection of photographs, good graphs, and maps. Weighing 3.5 kilograms and containing a total of sixty-nine articles divided into six sections, the book reads as an encyclopedia—everything that one needs to know about the Soviet and German occupation of Estonia. The historians affiliated with the commission did a good job combing through Estonian, German, and partially Latvian archives. They provided a fairly comprehensive, factual overview, showing a good command of primary sources. The section called “The German Occupation of Estonia” consists of nineteen entries over 225 pages. In addition to the articles that deal with the Soviet war crimes investigations, seven articles discuss the various stages of the Holocaust in Estonia. What is missing in this particular section, and throughout the volume, is analysis and interpretation. The reader is left with a massive body of facts, which are often nothing more than statistics. The issue of motivation, which is central to the whole discussion of local collaboration, is only scantily touched upon. The conclusions are almost stereotypical: brutalization of warfare and the desire to

avenge the victims of the Soviet regime.¹¹ To explain this and other lacunae in the “Reports” one needs to take a closer look at the commission setup.

The preamble to the commission’s “Reports” is most instructive, as it explains its *raison d’être*. According to then president of Estonia, Lennart Meri, the commission was not supposed to act as a judicial or prosecutorial body. One can observe certain parallels with so-called truth and reconciliation commissions, except that in the Estonian case reconciliation was not on the agenda. The “Statement” printed immediately after Meri’s “Word of Address,” however, outlined a somewhat different objective of the commission. It urged collecting *all* available documentary evidence and interviewing *all* surviving eyewitnesses, thus giving the “Reports” the appearance of legal proceedings. This contravenes a self-evident fact that history cannot be presented as absolute truth, and hence any work of history is incomplete. Unfortunately, the Estonian commission did not take this into consideration when seeking to attach a seal of proof to the body of facts that it had collected.

The volume displays a tendency to appropriate history. In the section that precedes the scholarly part of the commission’s publication, the contributing historians assessed the degree of criminal responsibility by particular individuals and agencies. By proclaiming the B-IV department of the Estonian Security Police a criminal organization they unwittingly fell back on the Nuremberg precedent (which delivered a similar a priori judgment on the German SS, the Security Service, and the Gestapo). By effectively introducing a guilty verdict, the “Reports” further advanced a judicial rather than an interpretive line of argumentation. It also contained awkward sentences like “we recognize that Estonia and Estonians were a victim nation.” Even the use of the word *Estonian* by the commission is problematic. By considering nationality rather than ethnicity as a prime form of identification, it has superimposed modern discourse where it does not apply.

More problems arise when the commission attempts to define the crimes committed against the Jews and other minorities in legal terms. The official title, Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of *Crimes Against Humanity* (italics added), is a misnomer. The commission contradicts itself by acknowledging that the mass murder of Jews and Roma constitutes genocide and that the deliberate starvation of Soviet

¹¹ Meelis Maripuu, “Execution of Estonian Jews in local Detention Institutions in 1941–1942,” in *Estonia, 1940–1945*, 661.

prisoners of war is a war crime. To be on the safe side, the "Reports" reprinted the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in particular the articles that deal with crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes. In the final analysis, however, the commission failed to fit their findings within the context of international law. Humble attempts to put Nazi and Soviet crimes into a historical perspective proved to be unsuccessful. This comes as no surprise considering the peculiarities of some of the laws that have been enacted in the Baltic states since 1991.

Baltic legislation on crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes entail peculiar interpretations that would make experts on international law raise their eyebrows. For example, the law on the responsibility for the genocide perpetrated against the inhabitants of Lithuania, enacted in April 1992, interprets the destruction of human beings for any purpose as genocide. Therefore, Soviet mass deportations, according to this law, constitute genocide. In May 1998, then-chairman of the Lithuanian parliament Vytautas Landsbergis signed a resolution that declared mass deportations a war crime displaying characteristics of genocide. Another Lithuanian law from June 1997 combines crimes against humanity and war crimes in a single term *war crimes against humankind*. To make the application of these and similar laws easier, in July 1998 the President of Lithuania declared the NKVD and KGB criminal organizations that had committed genocide and war crimes against Lithuanian citizens.¹² Estonian legislation prescribes the intentional killing of anti-Soviet partisans as a crime against humanity. Several judgments in criminal cases resulting in the conviction of defendants have made use of this interpretation.¹³ Such casuistry made Lithuanian courts evoke charges of genocide in connection with crimes committed during Soviet rather than Nazi occupation. Consequently, Jews might have been indicted for genocide of the Lithuanian people.¹⁴

The broader question is whether the commission has achieved its objectives and if its work has furthered Holocaust awareness among the Es-

¹² *Foreign Power: Excerpts from Lithuanian Laws on Communism, Occupation, Resistance* (Vilnius: Lithuanian Parliament, 2000), passim.

¹³ Allan Jaarma, "Nõukogude okupatsiooni poolt 1940–1950-ndail aastail Eestis toime pandud sõja- ja inimsusevastaste kuritegude uurimine ja inimsusevastaste kuritegude eest vastutusele võtmine" [Accountability and the investigation of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Estonia in the 1940s and 1950s by the Soviet Union], lecture delivered at the Estonian National Library in Tallinn on April 24, 2001.

¹⁴ Lev Krichevsky, "Lithuania May Indict Jews for Genocide," *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, December 11, 1997; Rokas M. Tracevskis, "Law Opens Way for Genocide Home Trials," *The Baltic Times*, March 16–22, 2000.

tonian population. The main goal has definitely been attained, namely demonstrating to the West European and American political establishment that the Baltic governments were ready to submit even the most complex aspects of recent history to critical examination. Ironically, the "Reports" were published *after* Estonia had officially joined NATO and the EU. After all, setting the historical record straight was not the most important criterion for admission. What about the impact of the volume on the historical consciousness of the Estonians? I do not share the cautious optimism of Matthew Kott, who believes that the publication of the "Reports" could well stimulate innovative Holocaust research in Estonia.¹⁵ The commission set out to produce a definitive study, factually accurate and legalistically correct. However, one does not usually question a reference work, particularly if it has been approved for publication by an international body. The commission failed to solve the dilemma of reconciling history and law. The way the commission treated the Holocaust does not open new vistas but rather reinforces old misconceptions. Estonian scholars compartmentalize the history of the Nazi genocide by dealing separately with the Estonian, Czech/German, Polish/Lithuanian, and French Jews. As we know all too well, the Nazis were exterminating the Jewish people not as Estonian, Lithuanian, French, or other nationals, but as Jews. Last but not least, there is a question of accessibility: how many Estonian readers would be willing to spend 750 Estonian crowns, or 50 euro in today's currency (around one-fifth of the minimum wage) for an encyclopedic volume in English that contains information on both Soviet and Nazi occupations?

The Zuroff Controversy and Vox Populi

Although the treatment of the Holocaust in Estonian historiography suggests certain tendencies, the works of historians may not always accurately reflect the views of the general public. Because of the marginality of the Holocaust as a subject matter in Estonia, we do not have any official opinion polls to fall back on. The advent of electronic media, how-

¹⁵ Matthew Kott's book review of *Estonia 1940–1945 in Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 323. Eva Clarita Onken tends to share my pessimism regarding the volume's potential in encouraging debate and critical reflection. Cf. Onken, "The Politics of Finding Historical Truth: Reviewing Baltic History Commissions and their Work," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38, no. 1 (March 2007): 112. Indeed, since the publication of the "Reports" in 2006, no major new studies of the Holocaust have appeared in Estonia.

ever, has provided us with one source that makes it easier to examine: the so-called *vox populi*. Since the late 1990s, nearly all Estonian newspapers have been giving their readers the option of commenting on any article of interest online. Until recently, the rules and regulations governing electronic media in Estonia have not been strictly enforced, enabling Internet users to freely exchange extreme views.

I have examined the comments submitted by readers of Estonia's two largest dailies and one weekly. I looked specifically at Holocaust-related articles published between 2001 and 2003 in *Postimees*, *Päevaleht*, and *Eesti Ekspress*. The fact that of all East European countries, Estonia has, after Slovenia, the highest number of internet users per thousand inhabitants makes it a fairly representative sample of the population. Altogether I read through some three thousand electronic submissions. Most authors use nicknames or do not disclose their identity at all. Frivolous names refer to the younger cohort, whereas older commenters tend to sign by their real names. Some names appear more than once, attesting to their interest in the subject. So what are the issues that trigger discussion? Phrased differently and in different contexts, the problem may be formulated as follows: What is the Estonian share in the Holocaust and what should be done with indigenous collaborators, if anything?

The rise of interest in, or rather emotions toward, the subject of the Holocaust in Estonia around the year 2002 is not accidental. The individual responsible for this development is Efraim Zuroff, Director of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Zuroff, who made his career hunting down former Nazis and their collaborators, accused the Estonian authorities of harboring war criminals (he had previously leveled similar accusations against the Latvians and the Lithuanians). In the summer of 2002, the U.S. ambassador in Tallinn further heated the debate by lamenting Estonia's reluctance to prosecute Nazi collaborators. Having failed to prompt Baltic governments to open investigations against certain individuals, Zuroff made an unprecedented move by offering a \$10,000 reward to anyone who would assist his office in gathering incriminating evidence leading to successful prosecution. Zuroff called the campaign that he had launched "Operation Last Chance."¹⁶

The vituperative response to Zuroff's demarche would surprise even the most experienced among scholars of antisemitism. All the century-old

¹⁶ For Zuroff's personal account see his autobiographical book, *Operation Last Chance: One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009), 151–60.

stereotypes came to the fore: deicide, ritual murder, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and so on. A few newspaper readers suggested that Zuroff be gassed, processed into soap, or at least declared persona non grata. One *Päevaleht* reader asked: "Why is the Jewish nation hated around the world? Was there any war that had not been organized at least by a few Jews?" "Europeans hate the Jews," another reader echoed, while still another, writing under the moniker "Anti-Juden," declared that "Zyklon-B would be a good solution—let us just pour it over Jerusalem, only in the Jewish quarters of course." The following comment covers pretty much all the main themes in antisemitic folklore in Estonia: "The Jews want to make Europeans serve them. This is why they are making good use of the Holocaust myth. They will not be able to play this trick on Estonians, however. We are not going to fall on our knees, begging forgiveness for the non-existent crimes. The Jews have killed Estonians and other peoples en masse, which cries out for another Nuremberg." One other commenter tried to prove that the United States was essentially a "Jewish State": "In some non-Jewish schools one celebrates Hanukkah instead of Christmas!" Particularly troubling is the desire to identify some individuals as Jewish. For the first time ever, members of the Estonian cultural elite such as Eri Klaas and Eino Baskin were labeled "Jews," not just individuals.

Most Estonians deny that their countrymen hold any responsibility for crimes committed during the Second World War. According to a legalistic argument, Estonia was an occupied country. This qualification supposedly exempts its citizens from personal responsibility and simultaneously denies the Wiesenthal Center the right to request the Estonian state to prosecute alleged war criminals. According to the "humanitarian" argument, it does not make any sense to indict old men who are going to die soon anyway. If nothing else could stop Zuroff in pursuit of his mission, several readers suggested to just ignore him.

Another peculiar feature of the Holocaust discourse in Estonia circa 2002 was its pronounced anti-Russian character. The line of argumentation goes as follows: Jewish claims regarding Estonian accountability in wartime atrocities was part of a devious plan to prevent Estonia from joining the European Union and NATO. Of all the international players, then, Russia should be the most interested in cutting short Estonia's tour de force. Efraim Zuroff must therefore be in conspiracy with the Russian Security Service. One reader even remembered having personally met one of Zuroff's relatives who had allegedly resided in the former Estonian province of Pechory. "It is all about politics," wrote another, "first there was the myth of discrimination against the Russian minority, and now

there is the Jewish theme.” Bitter at Russia’s refusal to admit Soviet crimes committed in Estonia, several participants in the exchange tried to challenge Zuroff by suggesting that his office should start operations in the Russian Federation. Local Russians, it should be noted, have for the most part refrained from participating in the discussion. The local Russian press, however, seized the opportunity to stress the plight of ethnic Russians (more so in Latvia than in Estonia or Lithuania), by hinting at the “innate” antisemitism of the Baltic peoples.

The next stage in the popular discussion, predictably, was to align political discourse with a stereotype of money-greedy Jews. Some people argued that the Wiesenthal Center was investigating Nazi and not Soviet crimes because there were many Jews among the communists. Quite a few communists allegedly entered Israel among the masses of Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union. Therefore, it was naive to expect that Jewish organizations would support the search for collaborators with the Soviet regime. Even after the last Nazi criminal died, some readers argued, Zuroff would still find one in order to keep himself busy, that is, to retain his source of income.

The overwhelmingly negative response to Operation Last Chance suggests that Estonians interpret justice rather narrowly. Ordinary people accept only a quid pro quo type of justice, or else find refuge in relativism. The commenters typically stressed that Jews were not the only ethnic or religious group in human history who have endured suffering, and that conferring a special status upon the Jews would be unfair with respect to Native Americans, Armenians, Roma, and others. Other discussants had an altogether different proposition: “What is important is to concentrate on all things Estonian, while leaving aside others’ problems and suffering. There is simply not enough time, money, or energy to share it equally among all.” Many Estonians are eager to engage in a comparative victimization contest. Among other things, in the course of the heated online exchange one heard that the Estonian nation—which arguably did experience genocide—had in fact endured the most suffering in the history of humankind. It was to be expected that Judeobolshevism became the next subject of the discussion. Was it not the Jews who played a prominent role in dismantling the Estonian state in 1940? By way of illustration, some newspaper readers volunteered the information on this or that Soviet official who happened to be Jewish. Finally, the contributors joined in pseudo-intellectual bashing of Israel for its policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians. The message could be translated as follows: you, the Jews, have no moral right to judge us!

However vague the idea of justice held by many ordinary Estonians, Zuroff's approach appears to have been equally misguided. According to Zuroff, he pursued a threefold objective when he first came to Estonia: to press for legal investigation in the case of one particular individual, to launch an educational program, and to have justice run its course. Unfortunately, the tactics adopted by Zuroff rendered his efforts futile. What should have rightly become the subject of a criminal investigation, Zuroff presented to the general public as definite proof. In so doing he ignored one of the basic principles of justice, that is, the presumption of innocence. (Zuroff told journalists that he would publicly apologize if his allegations were proved false.) Several discussants pointed out the factual errors in his statements. By offering money in exchange for information, Zuroff unwittingly invoked the much despised idea of denunciation, which had been introduced in Estonia mainly by the Soviets. The few sober voices emerging from an otherwise militant public debate hinted that Zuroff might have gained more support if he had chosen "more elegant" language.¹⁷

The contribution from Estonian intellectuals to the discussion was at best disappointing. Unable to advance a serious analysis, most newspaper articles and editorials simply ridiculed Zuroff's statements. Authors failed to find the right language to address the audience and therefore preferred to follow the mainstream. Perhaps the only Estonian intellectual who made a genuine attempt to reach deep into the Estonian collective memory was Jaan Kaplinski. Kaplinski chose the language of metaphor and hyperbole to deliver his annihilating commentary on Holocaust revisionism. Nor did he have any inhibitions when discussing bigotry in contemporary Estonian society. He argued that in order to be able to put national history into perspective, Estonians had to first remove the handicap of nationalist ideology.¹⁸ The problem is that the people who have been reading Kaplinski's writings do not need to be convinced. Those who tend to think in black-and-white categories, however, refuse to listen. As one reader commented on Delfi—a major Internet portal in the Baltic region—in May 2007: "Kaplinski has never cared for Estonians, but only appealed on behalf of the Jews and the Russians."

¹⁷ See also my review of Zuroff's book in *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 2010), 142–44.

¹⁸ Jaan Kaplinski, "Mida need juudid ometi tahavad?" [What these Jews really want?], *Vikerkaar*, 8–9 (2001): 214–19.

The Estonian Jewish Community

The Estonian Jewish community has remained for the most part on the sidelines when it comes to the examination of the most tragic period in its history. Less than five thousand strong, the local Jewish community stood at the forefront of the minority movement in Estonia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Alongside Swedish, German, Belorussian, Tatar, and other numerically insignificant ethnic groups, the Jews have been viewed by the government as a loyal minority, in contrast to the sizeable Russian minority that has maintained links to Russia.

Although predominantly Russian-speaking, the Estonian Jews have been careful to distance themselves from any forms of separatism arising from within the local Russian community. At the same time, they have not developed their own agenda for the study and teaching of Jewish history in Estonia, including the Holocaust. In comparison, the Lithuanian Jewish community, which is only marginally larger than Estonian, has since the late 1980s operated its own museum with a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust in Lithuania.¹⁹

The lack of a well-defined position on issues of history (which tends in Eastern Europe to be interwoven with politics) came to haunt Estonia's Jews during the Zuroff controversy, caught between the proverbial hammer and the anvil. Zuroff emphasized that he was working in close cooperation with the local Jewish community, whose phone number was featured in the advertisement that his office placed in the newspapers. Consequently, public opinion held the Jewish community responsible for anything Zuroff said. The message was clear: you better tell Zuroff that the Jews live happily in Estonia or else we will hate you all! Unable to withstand pressure, the head of the community Cilja Laud made a "gesture of reconciliation," arguing that what the Soviets did by having banned Jewish language and culture amounted to "cultural Holocaust." Next, Laud assured the Estonian majority that she personally did not believe that any collaborators in the Holocaust were still alive. Finally, referring to the results of a linguistic study that was commissioned for this particular purpose, she announced in the name of the Estonian Jewish community that she considered the publication of the advertisement by the Wiesenthal Center altogether inappropriate. This statement definitely improved the image of "our Jews" in the eyes of some Estonians but put the semi-

¹⁹ Though it has changed recently with the establishment of a private museum situated in the newly built synagogue in Tallinn.

independent status of minorities in Estonia in question. If anything, the nature of the discussion suggested that the titular population did not consider the Jews a part of Estonian history.

Remarkably, the initiative to memorialize the sites of Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia originated not in Estonia but in the United States. It was neither the Estonian government nor the local Jewish community but the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad that decided to erect markers, pursuant to a bilateral agreement between Estonia and the United States from January 2003. The commission was established in 1985 for the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage of American citizens of East and Central European descent, first and foremost the Holocaust sites. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the commission has been pursuing a secondary objective of helping nations aspiring to membership in NATO and the European Union to raise the standards of treatment of ethnic and religious minorities. As of 2004, the commission has identified five thousand sites in eleven countries.²⁰ While striving for historical accuracy, the commission failed to choose the most efficient mode of operation. When it comes to identifying Holocaust sites, the commission established a practice of using local Jewish communities as proxies. The Jewish communal leaders were expected to collect additional evidence from survivors and their relatives. The problem is that, as of 2005, there were only fifteen Holocaust survivors in Estonia. Most if not all of them had moved to Estonia after the Second World War from other parts of the Soviet Union, and therefore could be of little help in establishing the facts. At the same time, the invaluable data collected by local enthusiasts such as Boris Lipkin in Sillamäe have remained unutilized.²¹

Without knowing the context, one might be surprised to hear the explanation of the head of the Jewish communities in East Viru province Alexander Dusman regarding the delay in erecting cenotaphs. He stated that, among other things, it was not the best time and that there were some

²⁰ U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, "Report to the Congress and the President of the United States of America," (2004), 2–7, 20–21, available online at: http://heritageabroad.gov/Portals/0/documents/reports/2004_Report.pdf (accessed May 11, 2015).

²¹ Since the late 1960s Lipkin, who is not affiliated with the Jewish community, has been mapping the former sites of Jewish slave labor camps at Viivikonna and Vaivara and interviewing farmers who lived in the vicinity of the camps. The material thus collected appeared locally in the form of an article series and is presently available online: <http://eja.pri.ee/history/Holocaust/Lipkin.pdf> (accessed May 18, 2015).

political aspects involved. Dusman apparently referred to the controversy surrounding a monument to Estonians who had fought in the ranks of the German Waffen-SS. The monument at Lihula was erected in August 2004 upon the initiative of a local mayor, the notorious nationalist and ardent antisemite Tiit Madisson. The Estonian prime minister at the time, apprehensive of negative reactions abroad, ordered the monument to be dismantled, causing a public outcry and a minor government crisis. Nationalist sentiments flared, peppered by occasional antisemitic remarks. Ironically, in October 2005 the monument was rebuilt on the grounds of a privately owned museum at Lagedi near Tallinn, without attracting much public attention.²² Sociologist Andrus Saar warned that in the ideologically charged environment created by the Lihula affair the erection of new memorials could strain interethnic relations.²³ What both Dusman and Saar meant was that the radical elements in Estonian society would object to the commemoration of Jewish victims while true Estonian patriots, as the former saw them, were not properly acknowledged by their own government. The memory of the Holocaust has prompted a bitter reaction from some Estonians who felt robbed of their status as victim. The ill-conceived balance theory has also extended into commemoration: if Communist crimes were as gruesome as Nazi crimes, then the perpetrators of the latter could only be punished if the perpetrators of the former were put into dock.

When making a connection between the Holocaust and Estonian history, ordinary Estonians, local politicians, amateur historians, and home-grown revisionists tend to speak a common language. The leader of a political party thus answered the question as to why the Holocaust has never become a subject of discussion in Estonia: "For fifty years the Estonians have been occupied and persecuted by Soviet power. The West did not help us when Estonians were deported to Siberia. Back then no one protested. . . . Therefore only few people [in Estonia today] are concerned about the crimes committed during the period of German occupation, however horrible they were."²⁴ A majority of online readers reacted nega-

²² Between July 29 and September 18, 1944, Lagedi was the site of a makeshift Jewish camp. The camp was located across from the train station and housed 2,050 Jewish prisoners from Ereda who were awaiting a further deportation to Stutthof concentration camp. On September 18, an estimated 426 Jews who had been previously transferred to Lagedi from Klooga were executed in a nearby forest.

²³ *Põhjarannik*, September 18, 2004; *Postimees*, September 10, 2004.

²⁴ Mert Kubu, *Sverige og Estland / Roots ja Eesti* (Trelleborg, The Swedish Institute, 2000), 44.

tively to the introduction of the Holocaust Commemoration Day in 2003. The commenters stuck to the “all suffered” argument, while alluding to past experience with official Soviet holidays that had only been insincerely observed. Estonian officials echoed these sentiments in their statements. In October 2000 then minister of education Tõnis Lukas declared that he did not see any need to study the Holocaust nor to mark Auschwitz Day in schools. His successor Toivo Maimets suggested three years later linking the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day in schools with events marking the mass deportation of Estonians in 1941 and 1949.²⁵ In January 2002 the Jewish community in Tallinn hosted a traveling exhibition about the life of Anne Frank. All the local Russian schools visited the exhibition, but not a single Estonian school.²⁶

Holocaust Denial

Popular attitudes toward the Holocaust and its commemoration in Estonia often carry over into the historical profession. Local historian Ivika Maidre, for example, argued against what she called the “double marking” of the sites of former Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia. “I would understand if those monuments had been put up by some kind of UFOs, but they were actually erected by people,” she said about the Soviet-era memorials marking some of the camp sites. The memorial stone at Vaivara erected by the Jewish community in 1994, according to Maidre, “had a Star of David and even a piece of barbed wire engraved on it. In other words, everything is already there.” As far as the main camp at Vaivara is concerned, Maidre believed that “many have an impression that it had been something horrible.” She backed her argument by referring to the fact that the former head of Vaivara camp Helmut Schnabel had been

²⁵ The Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, “Annual Report: Baltic States” (2004, 2005), available online at: <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/>; <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2005/baltics.htm> (accessed August 2, 2007; no longer available).

²⁶ Minutes of the roundtable meeting on minority issues by the Estonian President, June 10, 2002, available online at: <http://www.vp2001-2006.vpk.ee/et/institutsioonid/ymarlaud.php?gid/424080> (accessed July 5, 2007; no longer available). This does not imply that ethnic Russians on the whole are less prone to antisemitism than Estonians. In March 2004, two individuals were detained in Sillamäe—a city with a predominantly Russian-speaking population—for painting antisemitic slogans and swastikas on the walls of a building.

sentenced to sixteen years of jail but served only six: "Since he had not been incriminated in much of anything after the war, it appears that things were not actually that bad."²⁷

Holocaust denial, which began making inroads in Estonia in the late 1990s, has been firmly established since then. The publication of the Estonian translation of Jürgen Graf's infamous *Der Holocaust Schwindel* in 2001 helped spread the message and gain a following. In November 2002 the Swiss revisionist made a blitz visit to the Estonian capital and even received an hour on Estonian state TV. The undeserved attention that Graf received in Estonia made some of the participants in the discussion embrace as an authoritative source the pseudoscientific theories he has been promoting. However, it is mainly Graf's image as a martyr rather than his poorly constructed arguments that appeals to some nationalist Estonians. In 2005, Estonian revisionists received institutional cover in the form of a website called Sõltumatu Infokeskus (Independent Information Center). The Independent Information Center is a reincarnation of an organization established under the same name in 1988, except that it no longer adheres to the guiding principle of "not promoting ideas that incite violence, racism, and chauvinism."²⁸ In the best tradition of the California-based Institute for Historical Review, the Independent Information Center nominally promotes free speech but actually engages with conspiracy theories of various kinds, including the "Holocaust myth."²⁹

Remarkably, the two best known antisemites and Holocaust deniers in Estonia, Jüri Lina (b. 1949) and Tiit Madisson (b. 1950), are former dissidents who at one point were forced to emigrate (Madisson also served a six-year prison sentence). With the Soviet Union gone for good, they have discovered for themselves new enemies in the face of Jews and freemasons. Lina and Madisson have contributed to the body of revisionist litera-

²⁷ *Põhjarannik*, September 18, 2004. Schnabel was part of the Nazi camp administration from 1934, first at Sulza in Thuringia and then at Buchenwald. Many Holocaust survivors have identified Schnabel as the individual who carried out selections at Vaivara. He was implicated in homicide at Viivikonna and Narva camps and oversaw the liquidation of Ereda camp.

²⁸ <http://si.kongress.ee/?a¼page&page¼43e129325acc205ba5ece&subpage¼42f293855c1750876fbc> (accessed August 2, 2007; no longer available).

²⁹ According to the now defunct website (<http://si.kongress.ee/>), the organization was founded in response to the parliament's decision to drop the territorial claims against Russia (based on the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920). The unilateral decision of the Estonian President to seek membership in the European Union was cited as another unlawful act that warranted intervention.

ture by each authoring several antisemitic treatises. Lina's *Under the Sign of the Scorpion: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Power* (2003), Madisson's *The New World Order: Secret Activities of the Judaists and Freemasons to Subjugate Nations and States* (2004), and *The Holocaust: The Most Dispiriting Zionist Lie of the Twentieth Century* (2006) offer the usual mélange of insinuations and untruths from the repertoire of Holocaust deniers. According to Madisson, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* did not contain a call to destroy the Jews; the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938 was a Zionist provocation; the Wannsee Conference had nothing to do with the mass murder of Jews; no Jews were gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau; the Nuremberg Tribunal was a hoax; and so on. Most of his sources, predictably, come from the Internet. Madisson urged his readers to stop cringing before Zionists, as they did in the past before communists, and to break away from the "Holocaust industry" (referring to the term coined by Norman Finkelstein). Why do Estonians have to commemorate Auschwitz Day and learn about the Holocaust in schools, he asked, while the mass deportation of Estonians has not been ascribed universal significance. "Perhaps because our pain does not matter to the world," Madisson speculates.³⁰ The latest opus by Madisson, designated a "book for those who think," became a bestseller in the bookstore chain Rahva Raamat and received several positive reviews.³¹ Lina and Madisson appear to be the only East Europeans to enter the pantheon of Holocaust deniers. They have the dubious honor of entering an informal top twenty list alongside Jean Marie Le Pen, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ernst Zündel, and David Irving.

Holocaust denial is not criminalized in Estonia. Legal mechanisms that would effectively prevent the distribution of this kind of literature are missing. The government has refused to intervene, evoking freedom of the press. In spring 1993 bookstores in the Estonian capital received a ship-

³⁰ Jüri Lina, *Skorpioni märgi all: Nõukogude võimu tõus ja langus* (Stockholm: Referent, 2003); Tiit Madisson, *Maailma uus kord: Judaistide ja vabamüürlaste varjatud tegevus rahvaste ning riikide allutamisel* (Lihula, Ohvrikivi, 2004); Madisson, *Holokaust: XX sajandi masendavaim sionistlik vale* (Lihula, Ohvrikivi, 2006). See also Lina's article in *Eesti Aeg*, April 8, 1992. In his first book Madisson blamed the Jews for masterminding both world wars and the Bolshevik Revolution, financing Hitler, and planning a conspiracy to rule the world.

³¹ See, for example, Piirisild's review in *Pärnu Postimees*, April 19, 2006, and Aavo Savitsch's review on the website of the Independent Information Center, August 1, 2007, available online at: <http://si.kongress.ee/?a¼page&page¼42e12d241a164247355b6&subpage¼45016c51ddfee722755eb> (accessed August 1, 2007; no longer available).

ment of antisemitic pamphlets called *The Program of Jewish World Conquest* (a reprint of a publication banned in Estonia in 1933). The Justice Ministry could think of only one solution—to file a court case. In the end, the store managers yielded to the request of a member of the local Jewish community to remove the pamphlet from the shelves. Two months later, however, the same lampoon was printed in Tartu under the title *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The publisher ended up in court; the court of first instance in Tartu dismissed the case, but the court of second instance prohibited the circulation.³²

Antisemitism in Estonia: Aberration or Tendency?

How deeply is antisemitism entrenched in the fabric of Estonian society? The reluctance to reopen war crime cases, the rise of Holocaust denial, the lack of comprehensive historical studies, and the failure to see the long-term benefits of Holocaust education—all these aspects can all be viewed as part of a larger phenomenon. As always, most difficult is making generalizations about the so-called ordinary people, the common folk. The aggressive response to Zuroff's campaign might be circumstantial, and the anti-Russian attitudes might be caused by anxiety on the eve of joining the European Union, as some newspaper readers did indeed suggest. To check whether this explanation holds water, I have chosen an article on a relevant topic a few years down the line. My eye caught a piece with a provocative title, "Are the Estonians Judeophobes?" that appeared on March 3, 2005, in the Delfi Internet portal. By that time Estonia had already become an EU member, the Zuroff controversy no longer received prime coverage, and the Lihula affair was almost a year old. In other words, there was nothing that could spark immediate reaction. The article itself is less instructive than the responses it generated—422 comments to be precise—which show a profound interest on the part of the readers.

The article was written by Aavo Savitsch (1962–2009), a self-styled "history buff" (*ajaloohuviline*). Since writing this article Savitsch has become a fully fledged Holocaust denier. Although Savitsch did not directly address the question he posed, the arguments he used suggest a positive answer. The arguments are old: Jews suffered but so have other nations, including the Estonians; individual Jews who served in the NKVD tortured Estonians; the more we hear about the six million victims

³² Saks, *Kes on juudid*, 147.

of the Holocaust, the more exaggerated that number appears; after many decades since the end of war we should let the dead rest in peace.³³

The comments can be divided by major themes, which are as easily discernable as they are predictable. Judging by the number of messages attacking Zuroff, he has left a lasting impression on Estonians. The readers proved to be quite imaginative, fantasizing tortures to which they wanted to subject Zuroff, variously described as a witch hunter, moron, or pederast. "Thank you, Efraim, for having taught us to hate Jews!" one contributor summed up. Many argued that Jews should have been blaming themselves for everything that had happened to them. Jews carried out the Bolshevik Revolution and invented concentration camps; they played a leading role in both radical left and radical right movements. In other words, "there must be a reason why one particular people are being hated so much." Even worse, "a few among the Jews who mistreated Estonians are still around."

Some of the discussants suggested a "final solution to the Jewish problem" either in the form of emigration or physical violence. A reader who identified himself as "Liberty" declared: "The article gets ten points, and all the Zionists get the hell out of here!" "Adolf" further elaborated: "Everyone got fed up with this Jewish crap. Go live in your Israel and do not poke your nose elsewhere. It is common knowledge that Jews are one of the most deceitful peoples on earth." "SS" put it more succinctly: "Every Jew is a living advertisement for the next Holocaust!" Attempts to appeal to well-known historical facts prompted even more hostile reactions. Thus "Gabriel" wrote that thousands of Jews were murdered in Estonia with the help of the locals, and that Estonia was the first country in Europe proclaimed *judenfrei*. In response, someone threatened: "We will kill even more [of them] if you do not shut up!" In the mouth of the Delfi habitués, "Zionism" is a word of abuse that links together anti-Jewish and anti-American sentiments. Stereotypes such as crucifixion, international freemasonry, and the Talmud and its alleged evil message all make an appearance.

Particularly striking is the inability to sustain a dialog. Those who share the views expressed in the article—an overwhelming majority—crossed swords with rare opponents. Inattentive to what the other side was saying, discussants immediately proposed to put their antagonists against

³³ Savitsch, "Kas eestlased on juudivaenulikud?" [Are Estonians hostile toward Jews?], March 3, 2005, available online at: <http://www.delfi.ee/archives/print.php?id/49888280> (accessed July 29, 2007; no longer available).

the wall. A certain "Alexandrov," writing in all capital letters, praised the French law on Holocaust denial and lamented the negative effects of freedom of speech in Estonia. Those individuals who claim that the Nazis did not seek to annihilate the Jews should be fined, jailed, or even executed, according to "Alexandrov." In response, someone suggested to start killing off people like "Alexandrov" who "promote the Holocaust myth." One reader believed that "Estonians are one of the most tolerant nations in the world," while another insisted that "Estonians hate everything and everyone, a sick nation without the future." According to one other commenter, Estonians are also fervent homophobes.

Although homophobic attitudes did not emerge in the discussion over the Holocaust and antisemitism, anti-Russian sentiments featured prominently. Someone was wondering where antisemitism came from: "Ten years ago there was no other hostility but hostility toward the Russians. Jews should probably blame themselves for that." Another contributor stated plainly that "Estonians [only] hate Russians. Jews do not belong under discussion." Several readers believed that antisemitism has been deliberately promoted in Estonia by the Russian security service in an attempt "to spread hostile information about Estonians" and "to pitch Jews and Israel against Estonia." Soon enough, someone was inquiring whether the mother of the Russian president Vladimir Putin was Jewish. As often happens, those who preach antisemitism also tend to be xenophobic. The way two individuals, "Rgu" and "Ma," described Africans illustrates this phenomenon pretty well. "I like Arabs even less. Even Negroes are ok"; "False political correctness is when you cannot tell a Negro he is a Negro, since it is considered offensive. . . . I used to have a positive attitude toward the Jews. Now, however, my blood pressure rises when I hear the word *Jew*. In no time I have turned into a Jew-hater."

Those among the Estonians who have been unable to face the Holocaust are using the usual set of arguments to negate it. The most predictable of them is denial. For a particular individual, Savitsch's article proved a revelation: "I am very glad that someone has dared to describe also the other side, and not what Jews have been telling [us]." Many readers are eager to engage in the numbers game: "The figure, six million Jews, has been falsified. In reality, the Nazis killed a few thousand communists, whom Estonians would have cleansed sooner or later anyway." The ongoing conflict in the Middle East provides a further excuse for ignorance: "The number of Jewish victims in Germany is bluff, chutzpah. One has to hoist the Palestinian flag on the Holocaust Day!" "Ein Mensch" went further than any other commenter-cum-denier, praising

Hitler and his policies: "Such extraordinary individuals like Hitler get born once in hundreds of thousands of years. Hitler sacrificed his country and himself to save Europe from destruction. If it had not been for him, we would not be speaking Estonian now. Hitler was aware what he did when he adopted his racial laws. It was simply a question of survival. If it had not been for Hitler, the Jews would have seized power in Germany, and history would have turned bloodier." Notably, "ein Mensch" drew some criticism from his pen pals, not on account of his bigotry, though, but rather of his adoration of all things German.

The most potent conduit of Holocaust denial in Estonia is, however, historical relativism. A majority of Estonians have used the recent history of their country, the Soviet period in particular, as a measuring stick of human suffering and cruelty. One contributor spelled out this attitude in a single sentence: "As if we had not suffered!" The online readers keep repeating the same argument over and over again: "Believe me, Estonians suffered more than the Jews during the war and the subsequent Soviet occupation"; "Estonians did not have it easy either. We have been terrorized for a long fifty years but carry on living and do not whimper much. Better you shut up, Jews!" The commenters inevitably refer to Russia and Russians, past and present. One can often encounter the following exposition: "What is so special about the Jews that the international media is talking about them and their problems all the time? Why not other nations and their problems? For example, why have those who murdered Estonians not been prosecuted in Russia?"

The idea of Estonia as a victim nation makes commemoration of the Holocaust redundant. As one of the Delfi discussants stated: "True Estonians will never lower their heads before Jewish suffering because we endured even worse suffering. Americans and Jews do not understand that!" One after another, commenters discarded the Holocaust and its commemoration as something that allegedly belittles Estonians' trauma and provokes resentment. The discussion stalled when someone suggested: "Commemorate your Holocaust—why should we be bothered—but do not expect us to howl along!" A reader called "Zo" claimed that "emphasizing the Holocaust and its commemoration in Estonia causes additional hostility (does anyone in Israel or the U.S. commemorate our [Stalinist] Deportation Memorial Day?)." Some individuals argued that the "time has come to close this chapter and carry on with one's life." The older generation of Internet users not only rejected the need for Holocaust education but also asserted their right to impose this view on their offspring. "Capone" sided with Holocaust deniers when he exclaimed: "And

why should my children study this shit at school, which is apparently exaggerated and sometimes built directly on lies?”

It would be erroneous to conclude that antisemitism and Holocaust denial in Estonia is nothing but a result of collective trauma inflicted by Stalinist Russia. Even if for a moment we overlook the most extreme views, popular opinion superimposes the notion that Jews do not belong to Estonian history. The following commentary by one of the Delfi contributors is fairly representative of that mindset: “For some reason, the discussion as to whether Estonians are antisemites reoccurs when we commemorate our history and suffering. Jews do not respect other peoples’ history. Otherwise why do they consider themselves the chosen people?” This takes Kaplinski’s argument further, according to which the Holocaust means little to Estonians partially because they barely interacted with local Jews during the interwar period.³⁴ Comments like “I do not believe that this problem will disappear until after the last Jew has disappeared from the planet earth” sound outlandish, almost weird in the Estonian context. The Estonian Jewish community has shrunk by more than 50 percent (from 4,613 to 1,818) over the last twenty-five years, becoming virtually invisible. At the same time, many online readers argue that their attitude toward Jews started changing for the worse only recently. The irony is that as soon as Jews attempted to assert their identity—of which the Holocaust is an essential part—emerging from the rubble of the “family of Soviet peoples” myth, they made many of their former “relatives” feel uncomfortable. The numbers do not actually matter. Jean Paul Sartre had pointedly described this phenomenon in his essay, “Anti-Semite and Jew” (1948). Circumstances and names change but the emotional response stays the same. The name of this negative emotion is antisemitism, and there are quite a few people in Estonia who harbor it.

Naturally, not all of the individuals who express their opinion on the Internet are hostile toward Jews. Those few and far between sound depressed and pessimistic: “Just read those comments. Hostility is definitely there. Do not Estonians themselves like [discussing] the theme of deportation and suffering? Continually! All the time! Do you not get tired of it?” Someone followed the discussion closely: “At the moment we have got 387 comments, 95 percent of which condemn the Zionist cult of Holocaust as pseudoscientific, among them school kids and people with somewhat better writing skills.” One other reader went even further in his or her conclusions: “Most (perhaps 99 percent) commenters who have been

³⁴ Kaplinski, “Mida need juudid ometi tahavad?” 216

bashing Jews in Delfi.ee have not acquired even basic norms of ethics and behavior. It is unfortunate that people of the older generation harbor hatred and hostility. I think that one should be blaming one's parents, not the Jews." The saddest part is that during the entire discussion only one individual was able to explain what makes the Holocaust different from other forms of mass violence: "You should understand that whether Jews had been killed on a lesser or larger scale than the others does not matter. What matters is that were killed because of their ETHNICITY!"

Hate Language Versus Freedom of Speech

Ironically, each electronic submission carries the admonition "notify us of an inappropriate comment." Conditions of use provided by the webmaster state "Delfi prohibits comments written in ill faith as well as comments with offensive or insinuating contents promoting hatred. Delfi reserves the right to block such comments." Considering the extreme content of many messages that appear on its site, however, Delfi does not seem to have ever exercised its right. Among dozens and sometimes hundreds of online readers discussing a particular article, there are always a couple of people who acknowledge, rather mockingly, that a good half of the contributors should be prosecuted for the ethnic and racial slurs they promote on the Internet. A great majority of contributors, however, does not seem to realize that they are committing a hate crime, not unlike writing "Juden raus!" on the walls or firebombing synagogues. Thus, one of the readers appeared genuinely surprised: "Has anyone seen that in Estonia people throwing eggs at Jews and point at them in the crowd?" The concept of hate crime is relatively unknown in Estonia, since even those who commit them fail to register any wrongdoing on their part. It may be correct to suggest that a half-century experience of life in a closed society warped the idea of freedom of speech among Estonians, who appear incapable of distinguishing between the permissible and the intolerable. The medium of Internet, which tends to enhance a sense of anonymity, cultivates the false notion of tolerance. Some online readers believe that what they are saying about Jews has nothing to do with antisemitism, that it is just an instinctive reaction to particular circumstances. They do not know they *are* antisemites.

Neither did Olav Hannula when he proposed online to "burn the Jews." A twenty-three-year-old student of Tallinn Institute of Technology argued that he had nothing against the Jews per se. Rather, he claimed, his comment was aimed at Israel's domestic politics. On August 5, 2005, the court

of first instance convicted Hannula of promoting social hatred (in accordance with Section 151 of the Estonian Penal Code). The judge based her decision on the recurring nature of the offense; over time the defendant had published a series of insulting remarks about Jews and black people in online chat rooms, suggesting hanging the latter and making the former into soap. The court of second instance rejected his appeal, upholding the judgment, a fine of three thousand crowns (190 euro). Important as a precedent, popular reaction to the court ruling was disheartening. According to an Internet opinion poll, just 21 percent of the fifty-one respondents who cast their vote approved of the sentence, whereas 35 percent disapproved. Posing as a defender of free speech, Hannula received the full support of reactionaries of all kinds, including the Independent Information Center. As in similar discussions in the past, the essence of the hate crime, let alone ethics, has never been addressed. Instead, Hannula's supporters tried to vindicate him by resorting to dubious arguments. Referring to anti-Muslim statements on the Internet is one of them. "Why cannot one hate Jews, but can hate Muslims?" asked Jaanis Valk rhetorically on the Independent Information Center website.

The Hannula court case has generated a public discussion, which in its turn has influenced Estonian parliamentarians to take this issue further. On June 14, 2006, the parliament passed an amendment criminalizing incitement to hatred. According to the new piece of legislation, individuals promoting violence and/or hatred can be fined up to 18,000 crowns (1,150 euro). The landmark decision, referred to as the Delfi Law, is specifically meant to fight ethnic and racial hatred channeled via the Internet. Ordinary Estonians, regrettably, hold a negative view of the new law. An article in *Postimees* announcing the new piece of legislation generated eighty-eight commentaries, of which barely ten can be evaluated as positive. The most common word used with regard to the Delfi Law and the legislators that had enacted it was *stupid*. References to recent Estonian history were many: the "silent era" is again upon us; the authorities want to turn the entire population into police informers; acts other than rape, murder, or robbery do not necessitate criminal investigation; and so on.

Apparently, the Delfi Law has never been consistently imposed, as bigotry, racial slur, and incitement to violence is ever-present in the electronic media in Estonia. As before, attempts to explain the Estonian collaboration in the Holocaust keep generating the most extreme responses. Ironically, an uninformed online discussion of my book, *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust*, has further validated my analysis of popular perceptions of Jews and the Nazi genocide in Estonia. The book

was published in June 2009 by Syracuse University Press. On January 30, 2010, one of the biggest Estonian tabloids, *Eesti Ekspress*, printed an article by Pekka Erelt called “Historian who comes from Narva: Estonians lack humanity!” The article, styled as a book review, effectively ignored the eleven chapters of empirical research and went straight into the conclusion. Among other things in the conclusion, I analyzed existing scholarly interpretations of the causes of local collaboration attaching particular weight to a psycho-cultural theory exemplified by works of Roger Petersen, Ervin Staub, and Judith Herman.³⁵ Erelt described *Murder Without Hatred* as “useless propaganda book that incites hatred.” To prove his point, he distorted my argument and used innuendos; some of the quotations attributed to me actually belong to the scholars I cited, while others come from an earlier journal article and do not appear in the book. Erelt engaged in character assassination with statements like “by thrashing Estonians, historian Anton Weiss-Wendt attempts to earn laurels internationally” and “neither does Weiss-Wendt love his local coreligionists [i.e., Jews].”³⁶

The article provoked an unprecedented outpour of hatred. The record 452 online comments were extreme by any standard. The anonymous commenters attacked my personality, my integrity, and my academic credentials. Some of the readers called for physical violence. Among other things they suggested revoking my university degrees, prosecuting me, punching me in the face, castrating me, raping me, putting me in a cage, drawing me in a river, and finally killing me. In the process, many commenters wrote offensive messages against Jews and Russians, against the United States and the State of Israel, the university where I pursued my doctoral studies and the publisher of the book. However disgusting a read, the online comments perpetuated the very same themes that I earlier identified.

“Digital” labeled the book a “piece of Russian disinformation.” “Tammsaare” thought it was all about profit: “For the sake of money one

³⁵ See Weiss-Wendt, *Murder Without Hatred*, 323–45. See also Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992); Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁶ Pekka Erelt, “Narvast pärit ajaloolane: Eestlastel puudub inimlikkus” [A historian from Narva: Estonians lack humanity], *Eesti Ekspress*, January 30, 2010, available online at <http://ekspress.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/narvast-parit-ajaloolane-eestlastel-puudub-inimlikkus?id=28787571> (accessed May 13, 2015).

would publish whatever shit. Most important is to shock the readers, and money, money, money. . . .” “Pay no attention,” evoked certain “Nuhk,” “there are better people who come from Narva, even among those who were born after the war, when Judeo-Bolsheviks had reduced all Narva buildings to rubble, built barracks instead, and filled them with colonists.” Still another reader suggested that, judging by my name, “it has to do with aggressive Zionist offensive, which is most damaging specifically to local Jews.” “Here is yet another Jew of Russian origin who is hostile to Estonia” echoed this sentiment “Hmhm.” “Another salvo in the information war against Estonia waged by our neighbor to the east,” volunteered his opinion “Boris Pyssa.” “There is no doubt he managed to publish his slur thanks to Russia,” agreed “Musketär.” “Velirand” summed it up in one short sentence: “Jew is a Jew!” Another contributor veered off the discussion by implying a worldwide conspiracy by freemasons: “A large proportion of the freemasons are Jews. Eighty percent of the KGB torturers and bone crushers were Jewish. Now go and think for yourself. That is our future.” If there is one comment that captures the confusing worldview of some people in Estonia, it ought to be this: “Some Jew wrote a book that is offensive to the Estonian people. Conclusion: all Russians are pigs.” None of the commentators actually read the book; the slanderous comments are still available online.³⁷

History Didactics

As compared to the state of history writing and public debate related to the Holocaust, history didactics in Estonia has seen a major breakthrough. Even though history instruction at secondary school level has been somewhat slow to incorporate new teaching methodologies, Estonian teachers are now in possession of fairly good aids that make their task easier.

A typical high school curriculum in the history of the Second World War mentions the Holocaust as one of some fifteen to twenty different subjects. Having studied history for twelve years, an Estonian school graduate is expected to know the causes and consequences of the war, to name the major battles, and to discuss the Allied diplomacy that shaped

³⁷ Online comments on Erelt’s article in *Eesti Ekspress*: <http://ekspress.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/narvast-parit-ajaloolane-eestlastel-puudub-inimlikkus?id=28787571&com=1®=0&no=0&s=1#comment-top> (accessed May 13, 2015).

the postwar world.³⁸ The mass murder of European Jews and the racial character of the war in the East do not feature prominently on the list of acquired knowledge.

The most consistent attempt to correct that omission was made in 2004, when the Association of Estonian History Teachers released a teaching aid in Estonian and Russian under the intriguing title, *History is Not Just the Past/The Past is Not Yet History*. The 135-page-long publication is divided into four sections, of which most instructive are chapter 2, which deals with the Second World War, and chapter 3, which deals with the crimes against humanity committed in Estonia. When it comes to the war period, the teaching aid aims to break through the black-and-white interpretations, allowing students to argue their positions.

The handbook treats the Second World War primarily as a military conflict that affected the entire population of Estonia. Probably for the first time ever, the problem of collaboration is addressed head on. In contrast to histories from the early 1990s, participation in combat on the Soviet side is presented as a legitimate choice. Based on the reading of primary sources included in the aid, students are invited to consider the push and pull factors that made citizens of Estonia to join either the Soviet or the German army. When comparing the experiences of soldiers who chose different sides in the conflict, students are asked to explain why the war veterans have downplayed the impact of propaganda.³⁹

In the introduction to the section on collaboration, its author, Mart Kand, writes that it is often difficult to determine the true reason behind the charges of collaboration, arguing that it can be either the actual crime or the subjective opinion of the accuser. Teachers are encouraged to tell their students that collaborators have been commonly condemned. As a proposed group activity, students are invited either to come up with arguments in defense of collaborators or to make a case for the prosecution. The handbook discusses all but criminal forms of collaboration. One of the primary sources that students are expected to analyze is a photograph (without a caption) depicting a member of the Einsatzgruppe D shooting a

³⁸ Pärnu High School curriculum, 2005, available online at: http://www.ptg.parnu.ee/doc/oppekava.html#_Toc115670740 (accessed June 15, 2008; no longer available); Basic history curriculum: History teaching at secondary and high school level, 2002, available online at: <http://www.rrg.edu.ee/curriculum/ainekavad/ajalugu.doc> (accessed June 15, 2008; no longer available).

³⁹ Eda Maripuu and Mart Kand, *Ajalugu ei ole minevik / Minevik ei ole veel ajalugu* [History is not the past: The past is not yet history] (Tallinn: Eesti Ajalooõpetajate Selts, 2004), 47–71.

Jew in the Ukrainian city of Vinnitsa, with members of the Reich Labor Service—most likely Germans—observing the mass execution from a distance. Students are asked whether the soldiers in the photograph should be considered war criminals or individuals following orders, and whether they could have belonged to the groups of people seen in other photographs (fresh volunteers and recruits for the German and Soviet Army, respectively).⁴⁰ Leading questions suggest the conclusion that Estonians were not among individuals who carried out mass executions.

Obviously, the most difficult subject to handle is criminal collaboration in genocide. Chapter 3 of the handbook, “Crimes Against Humanity in Estonia: How Did it Happen?” seeks to answer the questions who was responsible for the crimes committed, what were their motives, and whether violence was directed against particular groups. An analysis of sources should prompt a classroom discussion about the causes of atrocities, perpetrated because Estonia was an occupied country or for any other reason. The chapter’s author, Eda Maripuu, sets to demonstrate, in her own words, that victims and perpetrators belonged to all the ethnic groups resident in Estonia. “The tragic fate of the Jews in German-occupied Estonia,” she writes, “is one of the most controversial and painful themes.”

A total departure from the conventional narrative of Stalinist terror, the selected few primary sources mainly discuss the suffering of ethnic Russians under Soviet regime. Altogether, the handbook provides a rather balanced account of the Soviet annexation and occupation of Estonia in 1940–41. Unfortunately, this does not apply to the subsequent period of Nazi occupation. One reason is that the author talks about the Holocaust and “Estonia,” not Estonians. The primary sources and the questions attached to them suggest that ethnic Estonians were by far the largest victim group, that antisemitism was barely present in Estonia, and that mass murder was perpetrated almost exclusively by the Germans—with the participation of just a handful of Estonian misfits. Despite attempts to accurately describe the suffering inflicted upon the Jews, the conclusion at which students would inevitably arrive is that all suffered! Nowhere in the text does it say clearly that the Jews, and often the Roma, were subject to racially motivated mass murder. Neither do the authors spell out the difference between genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, which they used interchangeably. The furthest they are willing to go is to pose, in rather vague words, a question to students: “What part did Estoni-

⁴⁰ Ibid., 72–87.

ans play in Jews' and Roma's fate?"⁴¹ To sum up: although the new handbook for Estonian history teachers is a big step forward, it fails to demonstrate the difference between genocide of Jews and Roma and victimization of other ethnic groups.⁴²

As a follow up, in January 2008 the Association of Estonian History Teachers, in cooperation with the Stockholm-based Forum of Living History, released a more conventional textbook dealing specifically with the Holocaust.⁴³ The textbook is meant for both classroom instruction and the Auschwitz Day commemoration. In June 2008, teachers who participated in creating the textbook took part in the Summer School for Holocaust Studies organized annually by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Not without reason, antisemitism has been described as a litmus test for democracy in any given nation. By extension, perceptions of the Holocaust in Estonia project the views of the ordinary Estonians onto their history. The Estonians seem to be engrossed in their past. The age difference appears to play no role in the popular conception of communism as the quintessential evil. Reflections on recent history have unexpectedly given a boost to latent antisemitism. Peculiar to Estonia, Stars of David (along with "friendly" advice to leave for Israel) that occasionally appear on the walls of buildings in larger cities sometimes contains a swastika, another time a hammer and a sickle. Discussion on the Holocaust in Estonia has also revealed certain insecurity about regained independence. One Internet commentator argued that the Estonians as a nation have an inferiority complex. Many Estonians are afraid to acknowledge that some of their countrymen committed crimes against the Jews, because they believe

⁴¹ Ibid., 96–105.

⁴² For a recent discussion of Holocaust education in Estonia, see Doyle E. Stevick, "The Politics of the Holocaust in Estonia: Historical Memory and Social Divisions in Estonian Education," in *Reimagining Civic Education: How Diverse Societies Form Democratic Citizens*, ed. Stevick and Bradley A. Levinson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 217–44; Doyle E. Stevick, "Education Policy as Normative Discourse and Negotiated Meanings: Engaging the Holocaust in Estonia," *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 40, no. 2 (June 2010): 239–56.

⁴³ Mare Oja, ed. *Holocaust: Allikad, õppeülesanded, mälestused, teabetekstid* [The Holocaust: Sources, student tasks, recollections, info texts] (Tallinn: Eesti Ajaloõpetajate Selts, 2008).

that by so doing they may stain the reputation of the new democracy. In effect, their fears make it even harder to emerge from a state of denial and to face the challenges posed by modernity. As postulated in the chapter's title, the Holocaust as such does not matter to Estonians. Yet it remains a significant source of irritation and resentment—whenever inculcated in a typical discourse on Estonia's experience in the twentieth century.

The Holocaust runs counter to the Estonian (read: Baltic) national narrative. According to this narrative, the Jews, who were marginalized as a minority, appear to be claiming victim status reserved for the titular population. This has revived the old stereotypes from deicide and treachery to greed and behind-the-scenes manipulation. In the current political context, the myth of Judeobolshevism has been replaced (or rather augmented) by a similar myth of the Russo-Jewish conspiracy. Some Estonians suspect the hand of Moscow behind the calls of the Simon Wiesenthal Center to prosecute the few surviving Nazi collaborators. Ironically, the upsurge of antisemitism occurred in the run up to EU accession. The peculiarity of anti-Jewish sentiment in Estonia, marked by references to the Soviet occupation period, adds value to Sartre's analysis of "antisemitism without Jews." No matter what the primary cause, latent antisemitism may come to the fore when and where we least expect it. Unfortunately, the Estonian case proves exactly that.

One should abandon the fiction that Estonia and Estonians are somehow unique in the context of Eastern Europe, being immune to the bacillus of antisemitism. References to the benevolent treatment of the Jewish minority and low levels of antisemitism in interwar Estonia obscure rather than help to explain the reasons why some Estonians decided to collaborate in the Nazi mass murder of Jews. Steady economic growth, high computer literacy, political stability, and media transparency cannot, and should not, deflect attention from the problems intrinsically linked to recent Estonian history and its interpretations. At the same time I acknowledge the limitations of my analysis. What *cannot* be answered with certainty is whether Estonians are more antisemitic now than they were, say, twenty-five years ago. One can only speculate what the electronic media could have revealed if it were as advanced in 1991 as it is in 2016.

The greatest challenge is to explain to Estonians (or Latvians and Lithuanians for that matter) the difference between Auschwitz and Kolyma, without rushing to emphasize the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust. Context is everything. There is an urgent need to put the Holocaust, as it played out in the Baltic, within the general history of the Nazi Final Solution. In other words, the Baltic scholarly community has to help the criti-

cal mass of citizens to break through the narrow confines of national history. Only then may ordinary Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians be able to face the issue of collaboration and the lasting consequences of denial *sine ira et studio*. Although the new status of EU member state has not performed miracles in this respect, it may prove beneficial in the long run. It is also clear that due to latent antisemitism, anything coming from Jewish groups will be considered biased. This automatically increases the role of local agencies—historians, intellectuals, politicians, NGOs, and so forth. The emphasis on the rule of law and constructive debate, macro thinking and universal justice would make Estonia's entry into the era of globalization smoother. And who said that history is not part of the globalization process?

Appendix:

Primary Sources on Estonian Jewish History until 1941

Digitalized collections underlined (e.g. F. 14)

Estonian National Archives (*Eesti Rahvusarhiiv* or *ERA*) in Tallinn

- F. 14 (composite collection: Ministry of the Interior)
Files on Individual Jews Seeking Estonian Citizenship, 1919–40
1,023 files
Registration of Jewish Organizations, 1919–40
105 files
- F. 148 (composite collection: credit institutions), 1872–1950
4984 files
Tallinn Jewish Credit Bank
Tartu Jewish Credit Bank
Tallinn Jewish Savings and Loan Institution
- F. 975 B. Minkov & Sons sawmill, Ltd., 1919–40
338 files
- F. 1107 Cultural Autonomy of the Jewish Minority in Estonia, (1919) 1926–40
228 files
- F. 2199 [Soviet] Commission for the Liquidation of Jewish Associations and Organizations in Estonia, 1940
20 files
- F. 2273 Tartu Jewish Cultural Board, 1927–40
19 files
- F. 2274 Valga Jewish J. A. Peretz Literary-Drama Society, 1920–31
8 files
- F. 2275 Võru-Petseri Jewish Cultural Board, 1926–40
14 files
- F. 2276 Pärnu Jewish Cultural Board, 1926–34
8 files
- F. 2277 Viljandi Jewish Cultural Board, 1926–40
14 files
- F. 2278 Narva Jewish Cultural Board, 1926–40
22 files
- F. 2279 Valga Jewish Cultural Board, 1926–40
28 files
- F. 2280 Tartu Jewish Cultural Association Sholem Aleichem, 1928–40
9 files

- F. 2282 Physician Nosson Gens, 1905–40
43 files
- F. 2283 Tartu Jewish National Club, (1887) 1917–40
127 files
- F. 2284 Tartu Jewish Congregation, 1861–1940
106 files
- F. 2285 Tartu Jewish Welfare Agency, 1898–1940
26 files
- F. 2286 Newspaper *Juudi Sõna* Editorial Board (correspondence), 1920
1 file
- F. 2289 Tartu Jewish Student Fund, 1898–1928
16 files
- F. 2290 Valga Jewish Sports Club Maccabi, 1917–20
1 file
- F. 2291 Limuvia Fraternity Alumni Association (The University of Tartu), 1929–36
3 files
- F. 2292 Limuvia Fraternity, 1882–1940
301 files
118 files (academic paper abstracts)
- F. 2293 University Student Club Hasmonaea, 1923–40
6 files
- F. 2294 Jewish Academic Historical and Literary Society, 1883–1940
259 files
- F. 2296 Jewish University Student Club Fraternitas Osidia, 1926–31
13 files
- F. 2297 Estonian Jewish Communities Association, 1919–31
14 files
- F. 2373 Valga Jewish Congregation, 1909–29
18 files
- F. 2495 Tartu Jewish Youth Organization for the Study of History & Literature Hait-Hio, 1919–24
2 files
- F. 2496 Newspaper *Kodimo* Editorial Board (correspondence), 1919
1 file
- F. 2688 Tartu Jewish Physicians Association, 1935–38
3 files
- F. 2760 (composite collection: women associations), 1906–40
344 files
Pärnu Jewish Women Association Zdako
Zionist Jewish Women Association Jung WIZO
- F. 2800 (composite collection: educational organizations), 1886–1940 (1943)
779 files
Pärnu Jewish Educational Society
- F. 3242 (composite collection: teachers associations), 1917–40
232 files
Jewish Teachers Association

- F. 3326 J. H. Kaplan's Steam Mill, 1924–40
6 files
- F. 3506 (composite collection: elementary schools in Valga), 1915–44
128 files
Valga Jewish Open Elementary School
19 files
- F. 4167 Jewish School Board in Estonia, 1928–41
9 files
- F. 4484 Attorney Samuel Levitin & Paul Kako, 1928–40
50 files
- F. 4485. Attorney Boris Kropman, 1927–40
50 files
- F. 4653 Kaplan & Press Clothing Store (accountancy books), 1918–28
2 files

Estonian National Branch Archives (*Eesti Rahvusarhiivi Filiaal* or *ERAF*) in Tallinn

- F. 2-M/O (composite collection: Soviet deportations in Estonia in 1941 and 1945)
Individual Files of Jews Deported from Estonia on June 14, 1941
102 files

Tallinn City Archives (*Tallinna Linnaarhiiv* or *TLA*)

- F. 11 Jewish Cultural Association Licht, 1926–40
17 files
- F. 13 Tallinn Jewish Private High School Alumni Association, 1936–41
8 files
- F. R-389 Tallinn Jewish Cultural Center, 1940–41
6 files
- F. 855 Tallinn Jewish Elementary School, 1913–23
Tallinn Jewish Private High School and Elementary School, 1913–40
9 files
- F. 1383 Jewish Social Club, 1918–40
66 files
- F. 1384 Tallinn Jewish Charitable Organization Zdoko-Gdoilo, 1927–40
78 files
- F. 1385 Jewish Merchant and Industrialist Association, 1930–40
10 files
- F. 1386 Tallinn Jewish Bridge Player's Club, 1936–40
8 files
- F. 1387 Tallinn Jewish Community (inclusive of registers of births, marriages, and deaths, 1866–1926), 1859–1940
278 files
- F. 1388 Max Nordau Tallinn Jewish Youth Club, 1921–22
2 files

- F. 1389 Tallinn Jewish Communal Bank, 1940–41
23 files

Estonian Historical Archives (*Eesti Ajalooarhiiv* or *EAA*) in Tartu

- F. 402.2 (composite collection: Imperial University of Tartu)
Student files
- F. 1455 Tartu (Derpt/Yuriev) Merchant Dynasty Selmanovich, 1884–1939
7 files
- F. 2037 Tartu (Derpt/Yuriev) Jewish Private Elementary School, 1876–1925
Tartu Jewish Elementary School no. 17, 1926–41
443 files
- F. 2038 Tartu Jewish Private Secondary School, 1926–36
Tartu Jewish Private Vocational School, 1937–41
251 files
- F. 2039 Moisei Pikarevich Company in Tallinn (Reval), 1895–1917
5 files
- F. 2100 (composite collection: The University of Tartu)
- 157 Limuvia Fraternity Membership Lists, 1933–38
 - 360 Academica Fraternity and Jewish Academic Historical and Literary Society, 1918
 - 27 Academica Fraternity and Jewish Academic Historical and Literary Society, Charter and Membership Lists, 1920–41
 - 150 Hazfiro Sorority Charter and Membership lists, 1929–38
 - 158 The Establishment of a Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Tartu, 1929–41
 - 159 Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Tartu, Charter and Correspondence, 1936–37
 - 160 Jewish Student Fund, Charter and Membership Lists, 1920–39
 - 161 Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Tartu, Doctoral Exams (Salomon Herbst, Kálmán Chameides, Samson Weiss, Moses Ziegler), 1936–37
 - 197 Limuvia Fraternity, Charter and Correspondence, 1940
 - 291 Jewish Learned Society Satal, Charter and Membership Lists, 1932–39
- F. 5413 Tartu Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1861–99, 1906–26
75 files
- F. 5417 Narva Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1911–26
27 files
- F. 5419 Valga Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1919–25
1 file
- F. 5420 Viljandi Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1917–26
1 file

- F. 5421 Võru Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths,
1883–1926
2 files
- F. 5422 Rakvere Jewish Congregation, Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths,
1921–26
1 file

The University of Tartu Library (*Tartu Ülikooli Raamatukogu* or *TUR*), Manuscript and Rare Book Division

- 47 Lazar Gulkovich, Chair of the Judaic Studies Department at the University
of Tartu, 1908–41
20 files
- 55.1 (composite collection: The University of Tartu, 1802–1919)
219 Tartu Jewish Student Fund, 1911–12
229 Tartu Jewish Student Fund, 1911

Jewish Historical Institute Centropa in Vienna
(<http://www.centropa.org/>)

Oral history interviews with Estonian Jews

Amalia Blank (b. 1910)
Revekka Blumberg (b. 1937)
Perle Liya Epshteyn (b. 1930)
Etta Ferdmann (b. 1934)
Leo Ginovker (b. 1914)
Margarita Kamiyenskaya (b. 1917)
Liya Kaplan (b. 1922)
Ester Khanson (b. 1919)
Anatoli Kraemer (b. 1924)
Dina Kuremaa (b. 1926)
Henrich Kurizkes (b. 1924)
Ruth Laane (b. 1938)
Cilja Laud (b. 1938)
Bluma Lepiku (b. 1926)
Rachel Randvee (b. 1929)
Simon Rapoport (b. 1924)
Boris Rubinstein (b. 1929)
Elkhonen Saks (b. 1927)
Juliana Sharik (b. 1938)
Siima Shkop (b. 1920)
Ruth Strazh (b. 1925)
Mariasha Vasserman (b. 1928)
Masha Zakh (b. 1936)
Sarah Zauer (b. 1923)

Estonian Jewish Museum in Tallinn (<http://www.eja.pri.ee/>)

Selected documents under the following categories: history, education, Holocaust and antisemitism, genealogy, Jewish community, Jewish place names, memoirs, Jewish organizations prior to 1940, religion, sport, arts & science, business, varia.

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